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## Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844; Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories, 1831-1847

James B. Allen  
*Brigham Young University*

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Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, editors.  
*Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832-1844.*

Vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*,  
ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman.  
Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012.

Karen Lynn Davidson, Richard L. Jensen, David J. Whittaker,  
editors. *Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories, 1831-1847.*

Vol. 2 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*,  
ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman.  
Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2012.

*Reviewed by James B. Allen*

I am always delighted to pick up a new volume of the *Joseph Smith Papers* and find that it continues the same book quality that has characterized the series from the beginning. Every volume is elegantly designed and solidly bound, and the editorial work is outstanding. Most of all, every volume includes documents that are invaluable in understanding and writing about early Mormon history.<sup>1</sup>

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1. I encourage the reader to visit the Joseph Smith Papers website, [josephsmithpapers.org](http://josephsmithpapers.org). Transcripts of all documents published in the *Papers* are included there, as well as full digital images of each document. There have been some complaints that the "Manuscript History," and particularly book A-1, is not being published. In fact, book A-1 is essentially the same as "Draft 2" in *Histories* volume 1. But a digitized copy of the original manuscript is published on the website, along with a parallel transcription. Also, under "Histories" is a link titled "Introduction to History 1838-1856 (Manuscript History of the Church)." Clicking on that link leads to an introduction to that important source, along with links to volumes A-1, B-1, and C-1. Clicking on these links leads to digital copies and transcripts of each of these important manuscripts. Given the huge expense of print publishing, it is easy to understand why some things may be published only on the website. Essentially everything of importance will eventually be available there, if not actually in print.

The team of scholars chosen to edit *Histories* volumes 1 and 2 was remarkably experienced and competent. Karen Lynn Davidson has taught English at Brigham Young University, and she has published hymns as well as historical works. One of her most significant historical works, coedited with Jill Mulvay Derr, is *Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry*.<sup>2</sup> David J. Whittaker is the author, editor, or coeditor of around ninety books and articles on LDS history and has enjoyed distinguished research fellowships at Yale University and the British Library in London. Mark Ashurst-McGee has published several articles and major works on early Mormon history, and was awarded the Gerald E. Jones Dissertation Award from the Mormon History Association in 2009. He has served with the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History at BYU, the Religious Education faculty at BYU, and the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Richard L. Jensen is author, coauthor, editor, coeditor, or translator of nearly fifty books and articles on LDS history, with particular interest in nineteenth-century European Latter-day Saints.

While not suited for casual reading, the new *Joseph Smith Papers* volumes are well worth studying. They provide the “stuff” of history: the original documents on which scholarly histories are based. In addition, the painstaking editing<sup>3</sup> and production ensures complete accuracy, and the editorial introductions provide insight into the efforts to produce a history of the Church during Joseph Smith’s lifetime. The editors have also provided several valuable study aids. The footnotes are copious and carefully prepared, providing important explanations and insights in addition to references to the source material. Source notes provide detailed information on the physical nature of each document and a bit of the document’s history. Each document is also introduced by a historical note that provides information on when and how the document was produced and why it is important. Each document replicates

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2. *Eliza R. Snow: The Complete Poetry* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990).

3. The editors were meticulous in discovering all they could about the documents. One indication of this is seen in the source note for the first document in volume 1, “History, Circa Summer 1832.” In reconstructing the physical history of the document, they discovered that at one point the initial three leaves were excised from the book containing them. They also ascertained that eight leaves in the back of the book may have been cut out at the same time, and that these excisions took place in the mid-twentieth century. The authors discuss in detail the physical evidence that shows when the leaves were removed. In the 1990s, the three leaves were restored to the volume.

the original manuscript as nearly as possible, maintaining all the original spelling, punctuation, strikeouts, and so on.

The extensive reference material in the back of each volume begins with a chronology for the years covered by the documents therein (1805–1844 in volume 1 and 1830–1844 in volume 2). Each volume has a biographical directory identifying nearly everyone who appears in the documents, as well as a glossary of terms in Mormon usage. There are seven maps in each volume, along with a map index that shows nearly every town or city mentioned within. Each volume also contains a Joseph Smith pedigree chart. In addition, volume 2 provides a comparison chart that shows the corresponding section numbers in the Book of Commandments and the several editions of the Doctrine and Covenants. It also includes a consolidated index to both volumes. All this reference material covers over one-fourth the total pages.

### **Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844**

Volume 1 begins with an introduction to the series titled “Joseph Smith’s Historical Enterprise.” This essay provides a sense of how intent Joseph Smith and his associates were on preserving an accurate history. One insightful paragraph suggests that compiling history should be not just a leadership responsibility but rather a collective enterprise of the Saints:

Joseph Smith’s instructions invited all Latter-day Saints to become historians. By calling on each Saint to add a personal chapter to the collective history, Smith’s letter effectively democratized Mormon historical writing. Moving beyond the personal, religious history of Smith’s own life and the sacred history of the church, the call for Latter-day Saints to put their persecution narratives in writing helped create an enduring self-understanding. As well as providing evidence for redress petitions and attempting to draw public sympathy for their plight, the community effort to create history served to strengthen the church’s cohesion and solidify what it meant to be Mormon. History, then, became a means not only to share their story but to forge a shared Latter-day Saint identity. (xxiv)

Volume 1 reproduces seven early histories, six of which were written by Joseph Smith’s scribes and associates. Only some of these histories were dictated by Joseph, but all were written in the first person.

The first document, “History, Circa Summer 1832,” is the earliest known effort by Joseph Smith to record his own history. It is also the only account of Joseph Smith’s early experiences that includes his own handwriting. Photographs of all six manuscript pages are included. In

their discussion of this important document, the editors raise the possibility that it is not the original document but rather a copy of an earlier manuscript. They point to the handwriting, which alternates between Joseph Smith's and Frederick G. Williams's, suggesting that the two may have simply taken turns in copying from an earlier source. There are other textual clues to this possibility. However, there is also some evidence that this is, in fact, the original document. The editors take no final position on this speculation.

However, the document itself is significant. As Joseph Smith's first attempt to write his own history, it is unpolished, containing virtually no punctuation, frequent misspelling, and sometimes awkward phrasing that reflects his lack of formal education. All this only adds to its power, for it exudes sincerity as the Prophet tells of his early quest for religious knowledge and of his First Vision. As might be expected, there are differences between this and other extant accounts of these early experiences, but these differences are not irreconcilable and actually add depth to our understanding.<sup>4</sup>

The second document in volume 1 is identified as "History, 1834–1836." It reproduces the text of a book kept by Oliver Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams, Warren Parish, and Warren Cowdery. The first of its sections was intended to be a genealogical record of the new Church presidency members in 1834: Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams. However, even though there is extensive information on Joseph Smith's immediate family, there is only a sketchy entry on Cowdery and no information on the families of the other two.

The second section of this document consists of minutes of meetings held on December 5 and 6, 1834. The minutes of December 5 are especially interesting, for they include instructions and activities that did not make it into the serial publications of Joseph Smith's history in the

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4. In fact, an amalgam of all the various accounts provides a broader, more fascinating insight into Joseph's early experience than any one of them alone. For the first discussion on this issue in an official LDS publication, see James B. Allen, "Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision—What Do We Learn from Them?" *Improvement Era* 73 (April 1970): 4–13. For an updated and more extensive version of this discussion, see James B. Allen and John W. Welch, "The Appearance of the Father and the Son to Joseph Smith in 1820," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson (Provo, Utah: BYU Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 35–77.

*Times and Seasons*.<sup>5</sup> One of the items included is a report of a very sharp rebuke, given by the “voice of the Spirit,” concerning “our former low, uncultivated, and disrespectful manner of communication, and salutation, with, and unto each other” (34). But the writer hastened to add that “though it [the rebuke] was given in sharpness, it occasioned gladness and joy, and we were willing to repent and reform, in every particular, according to the instruction given” (35). This entry also includes the words of the extensive blessing given to Oliver Cowdery as Joseph Smith laid hands on him and ordained him to the presidency of the Church.

The next section consists of transcripts of eight letters on Church history written by Oliver Cowdery in 1834 and 1835 and published in the *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate*. For the most part, these letters focus on the Book of Mormon as well as on the character and early activity of Joseph Smith. As the editors note, “Cowdery composed the letters to inform the Latter-day Saints of the history of their church, but he also wrote for the non-Mormon public. Employing florid romantic language, frequent scriptural allusions, and much dramatic detail, he clearly intended to present a rhetorically impressive account of early Mormon history” (38).

The first letter tells of Oliver Cowdery’s early experience with Joseph Smith, including an account of John the Baptist’s visit to the two of them; the rest of the letters concern the general history of the Church, presumably written with the cooperation and approval of Joseph Smith. Cowdery mentions the unusual religious excitement described by Joseph Smith and young Joseph’s quest for truth, but he says it took place in 1823 (as opposed to Joseph Smith later dating it as occurring in 1820). Curiously, he does not mention the First Vision but moves directly to the appearance of Moroni and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. The *Joseph Smith Papers* editors make no comment on this omission. However, it has been speculated that Joseph Smith had input on what Oliver was writing, but he was simply unwilling at that early date to have the sacred story of the First Vision appear in print, even though he was telling it privately.

The next section of this document is Warren Parish’s incomplete copy of a letter Joseph Smith published in the *Messenger and Advocate* in November 1835. Warren Parish began to copy the letter, but after less

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5. When Joseph Smith’s history was eventually edited and published in six volumes by B. H. Roberts, Roberts included some of the information in a footnote for December 5.

than three paragraphs he crossed out all he had copied and did not continue. There is no explanation for this action.

This is followed by a daily narrative based on Joseph Smith's journal, covering the period from September 22, 1835, to January 18, 1836. Warren Cowdery wrote in an introductory paragraph that since Joseph was becoming "daily more and more noted, the writer deemed it proper to give a plain, simple, yet faithful narration of every important item in his every-day-occurrences" (94). Begun by Warren Cowdery and continued by Warren Parrish, it is what the editors describe as a "polished version" of the Prophet's journal, intended to be a "more refined and permanent" document (91). It is unclear why the scribes stopped where they did, but several blank pages at the end suggest that they intended to go further.

For comparison, the reader may want to refer to the Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, pages 64–164. The reader will note that the narration has been changed from first person to third person. In addition, the scribes sometimes changed the straightforward tone of the narration and also filled in some details, especially if they could enhance the image of the Prophet or in some way make the narrative more faith-building. To get a flavor of such emendation, consider Warren Parrish's expansion of the entry in Joseph Smith's journal for November 27, 1835, which reads in part: "Br. [Warren] Parrish my scribe being afflicted with a cold, asked me to lay my hands on him in the name of the Lord. I did so, and in return I asked him to lay his hands on me & we were both relieved." The edited version, written by Parrish himself, reads: "[Warren] Parrish his scribe being indisposed in consequence of having taken cold called on Pres. J. Smith jun. to pray for & lay hands on him in the name of the Lord; He did so and in return Eldr. Parrish prayed for & laid hands on him, this reciprocal kindness was heard and graciously answered upon both their heads by our Heavenly Father in relieving them from their affliction" (133–34).

The third document in volume 1, identified as "History Drafts, 1838–circa 1841," presents in parallel columns three early drafts of the history that Joseph Smith began in 1838. The editors explain that these drafts were part of an "evolutionary process" (193) in Joseph Smith's history writing, and they provide extensive and intriguing detail on how that process proceeded. In addition, an interesting chart shows the relationship between these drafts and the history that was eventually published by B. H. Roberts. For anyone interested in the history of manuscripts, the long introduction to these drafts is well worth reading.

“Draft 1,” inscribed by James Mulholland, is much shorter than the other two drafts and begins with part of the story of the baptism of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. The other two drafts begin with Joseph’s birth. The speculation is that this first draft was, in fact, a continuation of an earlier history produced by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon, which is no longer extant.

“Draft 2” is a larger manuscript begun by James Mulholland after Joseph Smith finished dictating history in July 1839. It was finished by Robert B. Thompson after Mulholland’s untimely death. This draft became the major source for Joseph Smith’s history as it later appeared in the *Times and Seasons*, the *Deseret News*, and, eventually, B. H. Roberts’s six-volume compilation.

“Draft 3” was an effort by Howard Coray in 1840–41 to refine the earlier draft. It appears that Coray may have been attempting to make the history more appealing to the general public, since he “deleted passages that seemed to be defensive, to plead the cause of the Saints, or to play on the reader’s sympathies. . . . The draft often softened wording about the persecution of JS, as can be seen in the omission of the first paragraph of Draft 2. Also, whereas the latter specifies that Methodists and Presbyterians treated JS and other Saints without respect, Coray’s draft avoided naming the denominations. Additionally, Draft 3 employs more moderate language in describing opposition to JS in New York, avoiding the word ‘mob’ and glossing over accounts of violence” (201).

There are other differences between the two, but in the end Joseph Smith preferred Draft 2. This became the source for the “History of Joseph Smith” published in the *Times and Seasons*. However, at the end of Draft 2, Joseph Smith indicated that since there had been rumors and false statements about Sidney Rigdon, he would proceed to give a brief history of his life. In the next four issues of the *Times and Seasons*, the “History of Joseph Smith” continued with a summary of Rigdon’s life, which is not reproduced in this volume. However, in the original manuscript volume, there are an additional thirteen pages, still in the handwriting of Robert B. Thompson, that give a brief biography of Rigdon.

The fourth document in this volume is titled “Extract, from the Private Journal of Joseph Smith Jr.” It was published in the first edition of the *Times and Seasons*, July 1839. However, after printing only two hundred copies the editors became ill. Later, they reset the type and republished the first edition, this time dating it November 1839.

The title is misleading, for even though the *Times and Seasons* called the document an “extract” from Joseph’s journal, it was not from



a journal and it was not intended to be private. Rather, the first two-thirds were based on a document titled “Bill of Damages against the state of Missouri,” prepared in the aftermath of the Missouri persecutions. Though it is in the handwriting of Robert B. Thompson, it was written in first person as Joseph Smith, and it was actually a petition to the federal government for redress. Joseph Smith had previously asked the Missouri Saints to document their sufferings and losses in Missouri, and apparently this was his own effort to do so.

This valuable piece of history is more than a bill of damages; it covers most of the Missouri conflict as seen through the eyes of Joseph Smith. While the original “Bill of Damages” ended with a list of the losses and sufferings for which the Prophet sought remuneration, the “Extract” ends with an impassioned plea to the American people “to stop this unlawful and unholy procedure; and pray that God may defend this nation from the dreadful effects of such outrages” (488). The “Extract” was distributed to the Saints across the United States, via the *Times and Seasons*, and “shaped their memory of the persecution in Missouri and their pattern for rehearsing it” (468).

In the “Extract,” the Prophet described in detail some of the persecution he both witnessed and felt, showing his anguish for the Saints and his family, yet also his faith in their ultimate triumph. A brief excerpt illustrates the content and tone of this powerful reminiscence:

[After Joseph was arrested and placed in the custody of Brigadier General Moses Wilson] I inquired of him the cause why I was thus treated. I told him I was not sensible of having done any thing worthy of such treatment; that I had always been a supporter of the constitution and of Democracy. His answer was “I know it, and that is the reason why I want to kill you, or have you killed.” The militia then went into the town and without any restraint whatever, plundered the houses, and abused the innocent and unoffending inhabitants. They went to my house and drove my family out of doors. They carried away most of my property and left many destitute.— We were taken to the town, into the public square; and before our departure from Far West, we, after much entreaties, were suffered to see our families, being attended all the while with a strong guard; I found my wife and children in tears, who expected we were shot by those who had sworn to take our lives, and that they should see me no more. (479)

The fifth document, “Church History,” is actually the well-known “Wentworth Letter” that Joseph Smith wrote to John Wentworth, owner and editor of the *Chicago Democrat*. He had requested a summary of the history and doctrine of the Church on behalf of his friend, George

Barstow. Barstow never published the letter but Joseph published it himself in the *Times and Seasons*, March 1, 1842. There is no manuscript copy of this letter extant, making it impossible to determine whether Joseph wrote it all himself or if it was originally in the handwriting of someone else. The editors assume the latter and that William W. Phelps may have been that person.

One argument for such reasoning is that a year later, Phelps revised and expanded the text of “Church History” in response to a request by the Clyde and Williams publishing company, in connection with a projected book on religious denominations in the United States. That book, edited by I. Daniel Rupp and titled *He Pasa Ekklesia* [The Whole Church]: *An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States*, was published in 1844. The article on the Church was titled “Latter Day Saints,” with Joseph Smith listed as the author. However, only the original Wentworth letter is included in *Histories, Volume 1*.

The Wentworth letter includes one of only a handful of contemporary written accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision that are attributable directly to him. It also provides at least a few interesting details not found in the official 1838 account (in the Pearl of Great Price). At the end of his description of the Vision, for example, he wrote to Wentworth that he was told to “go not after them [the religious denominations of the time],’ at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me” (494).

The Wentworth letter also contains the statements now known as the Articles of Faith. That fact is evidence that the letter was not completely original to Joseph, for, as the editors observe, the articles echo some of the wording of Orson Pratt’s 1840 writings. Pratt, in turn, based his summary of Church beliefs on the work of his brother, Parley P. Pratt. This should not be surprising, for it was only natural that these early Church leaders would draw upon each other for inspiration in how to succinctly word intricate doctrines.<sup>6</sup>

The final document in this book of histories is Orson Pratt’s *A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records*. It is included as an appendix, for it is not really a Joseph Smith document. He neither wrote it, assigned it, nor in any way supervised its creation. However, Joseph Smith was clearly the source of

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6. For a brief examination of the development of the ideas in the Articles of Faith, see John W. Welch and David J. Whittaker, “We Believe . . .: Development of the Articles of Faith,” *Ensign* 9 (September 1979): 50–55.

much of the document's content; the document itself became the source for the wording of some of Joseph Smith's histories, including the account in the Pearl of Great Price.

As a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, Orson Pratt was close to Joseph Smith and had many opportunities to hear him tell of his early visionary experiences. In 1839, under instructions from the Prophet, the Twelve left for England on an important mission that eventually had a profound effect on the growth of the Church. While Orson and his brother were in New York on their way to Great Britain, Joseph Smith arrived in Philadelphia. The Pratt brothers visited him there for two days, hearing him preach and holding private conversations with him. It is likely that during these visits they heard more about Joseph Smith's early life. While in Great Britain, Orson Pratt wrote and began to distribute his pamphlet (possibly by direction of Joseph Smith). Undoubtedly it was read later by Joseph Smith and others, and some of the wording (not the specific information) was adopted in some of the published histories, including the Wentworth letter. The Papers editors have made comparison easy by highlighting passages in *Interesting Account* that provided wording for Joseph Smith's published histories. Here are just two examples:

[*Interesting Account*:] His mind was caught away, from the natural objects with which he was surrounded; and he was enwrapped in a heavenly vision, and saw two glorious personages, who exactly resembled each other in their features or likeness. (523)

[Wentworth letter:] My mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness. (494)

[*Interesting Account*:] He was informed, that he was called and chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God, to bring about some of his marvellous purposes in this glorious dispensation. (525)

[Wentworth letter:] I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation. (495)

It should be noted that most of the information included in *Histories, Volume 1* is not new to anyone familiar with Church history. However, the value of this volume is twofold: (1) it brings these various primary documents together for easy access and comparison; and (2) the meticulous and detailed source notes, historical introductions, and explanatory

footnotes in connection with each document are invaluable tools for the careful scholar, for they present valuable information that is simply not available elsewhere (except on the Joseph Smith Papers website).

### **Assigned Histories, 1831–1847**

Volume 2 reproduces four histories that were not written or supervised by Joseph Smith but were assigned by him to others. The first item is “The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment.” It has been published twice previously.<sup>7</sup> However, the editors of this volume had access to the most recent research and, as usual, have done superb editorial work. The source for this reproduction is the original manuscript, which is in the custody of the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints).

Whitmer, one of the eleven witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates, was appointed by revelation through Joseph Smith, in 1831, to keep a history of the Church. He began working on drafts almost immediately, but the actual manuscript probably dates from 1838. Interestingly, he began the manuscript by writing, “I shall proceed to continue this record,” suggesting that he saw himself as completing the work begun earlier by Oliver Cowdery. His manuscript included letters, petitions, many of Joseph Smith’s revelations, and various other significant documents.

Whitmer carried out his obligations as a historian, but he was accused of financial wrongdoing and was excommunicated in March 1838. He refused to relinquish his manuscript to the Church, keeping it in his possession until his death in 1878. It was then sent to his brother, David Whitmer, and after David’s death it went to his son, David J. Whitmer. Upon the latter’s death, it went to his nephew, George Schweich, who sold it to the RLDS church in 1902. Whitmer’s history is especially interesting because it is highly personal. For example, his short, first-person discussion of the Church’s press in Jackson County says:

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7. See F. Mark McKiernan and Roger D. Launius, eds., *An Early Latter Day Saint History: The Book of John Whitmer Kept by Commandment* (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1980); and Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995). However, editorial decisions differ. McKiernan and Launius chose not to reproduce the document with its various dropped letters, dropped periods, etc., while Westergren chose, as did the editors of the Joseph Smith Papers, to reproduce it as closely as possible to the original.

When they found that we were unwilling to comply with their requests, they returned to the Corthous and voted to erase the printing [office] to th[e] ground, which they immediattly did. and at the same time took Edward Partridge and Charles Allen and tarred and feathered them threatning to kill us if we did not leav the county immediately.

They were also determined to demolish the store A. S . Gilbert pre-vailed on them to let it stand until tuesday next and have time to pack his goods himself

Tuesday arrived and death and destruction stared us in the face. The whole county turned out and surrounded us came to W W Phelps, and my hous and took us upon the publick square as also Partridge Cor-rill, Morly, and gilbert and wer[e] determined to massacre us unless we agreed to leav th[e] county immediately. Finally we agreed to leave upon the following condition (55).

Whitmer's history originally comprised nineteen chapters, concluding in 1838 with his and others' excommunication from the Church. After acknowledging his excommunication, he added this impassioned paragraph:

Therefore I close the history of the church of Latter Day Saints, Hoping that I may be forgiven of my faults, and my sins be bloted out and in the last day be savd in the kingdom of God notwithstanding my presnt situation, which I hope will soon be betterd and I find favor in the eyes of God and . . . his saints Farewell (95).<sup>8</sup>

Later, however, Whitmer crossed out the reference to his excommunication as well as that final paragraph and wrote three more chapters. There is a clear change in tone in these final chapters, as Whitmer became more disillusioned with Joseph Smith and the Saints in Nauvoo, although he never denied his original testimony. In chapter 21, for example, he wrote, "Now as I said before the Lord began to prosper them in Nauvoo, and as soon as they began to prosper they began to be lifted up in pride, and behaved vilely towards the people in Hancock County" (102). Then, in the next chapter, he let loose a personal attack on Joseph Smith:

He from this time began to be lifted up in the pride of his eyes, and began to seek riches and the glory of the world, also sought to establish the ancient order of things as he & his counsellors [Sidney] Rigdon & Hyrum, Smith pleased to call it. therefore they began to form themselves into a secret Society which they termed the Brother of Gideon,

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8. The ellipsis here is in the place where Whitmer inserted the words "All men" above the line.

in the which Society they took oaths that they would Support a brother wright or wrong even to the shedding of blood. (108)

That last sentence related to the formation of a group known as the Danites, which Joseph Smith's enemies often accused him of being associated with. The evidence for such an accusation is faulty, however, and research on the issue suggests that, though he knew of the organization and even appeared by invitation at one of its meetings, he had nothing to do with its founding and did not know or approve of its plans and methods.<sup>9</sup>

The second item in this volume is W. W. Phelps's "Rise and Progress of the Church of Christ," originally published in the Church's Missouri periodical, *The Evening and the Morning Star*, in April 1833. It covers only eight pages in the volume.

A convert to the Church in 1833, Phelps was soon directed by revelation to go to Missouri and assist in the Church's publishing work there. He founded *The Evening and the Mormon Star* and received instructions from Joseph Smith to "render the star as interesting as possible, by setting forth the use, progress, and faith of the church, as well as the doctrine, for if you do not render it more interesting, than at present, it will fall, and the church suffer a great loss thereby" (113).<sup>10</sup> Phelps responded by publishing this short history.

Phelps's history is basically a devout testimony. It begins with the briefest possible overview of the Church in New York, the decision to move to Ohio, the growth there, the sending of missionaries to Missouri, and the rapid growth in "the land of Zion." Indeed, Phelps affirmed that "the progress of the church though gradual, has been more than many of great faith had anticipated" (117). He also emphasized that the Church was taught by revelation and enjoyed spiritual gifts, such as healing the sick. He promised to correct falsehoods coming from other publications and concluded by affirming that the "progress of the chu[r]ch has been

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9. See Leland H. Gentry, "The Danite Band of 1838," *BYU Studies* 14, no. 4 (1974): 421–50; Dean C. Jesse and David J. Whittaker, eds., "The Last Months of Mormonism in Missouri: The Albert Perry Rockwood Journal," *BYU Studies* 28, no. 1 (1988): 5–41; David J. Whittaker, "The Book of Daniel in Early Mormon Thought," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990): 155–201; David J. Whittaker, "Danites," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 356–57.

10. "History, 1838–1856," *Joseph Smith Papers*, vol. A-1, 264.

great, and while we witness the spread of the work, knowing it is of God, we are willing to give the world all the light we can that will lead them to salvation.” For reasons unknown, he never fulfilled his promise to continue the enterprise in later editions.

After John Whitmer was excommunicated, Elias Higbee and John Corrill were appointed to replace him in keeping the Church’s history. Corrill was baptized in January 1831, and over the next several years he held several responsible positions. However, not long after his assignment as a Church historian, he found himself disillusioned with Joseph Smith and even testified against him in court. In March 1839, he was excommunicated, along with other dissenters. That incident helps account for the unusual and lengthy title of his history, published that same year in St. Louis: *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, (Commonly Called Mormons;) Including an Account of Their Doctrine and Discipline; with the Reasons of the Author for Leaving the Church.* This history is the third item in this volume.

The version of Corrill’s history reproduced here is taken from the printed book, for even though an original handwritten manuscript exists, it is incomplete.<sup>11</sup>

Corrill’s history is, in a sense, a spiritual biography: for it tells of his joining the Church, his early experiences, his eventual disillusionment, and his reasons for leaving. He began with a note on why he wrote it, remarking that in conversing with friends, he was frequently asked, “How did you come to join the Mormons?—How could you yield to their delusions?” The best way to answer, he decided, was to give a brief history that would enable the reader to “judge correctly of the true character” of the Church and the reasons for his own conduct (129).

Corrill began with his first encounter with Mormon missionaries and the Book of Mormon. Initially, he was convinced that the Book of Mormon was “published for speculation” and decided to have nothing to do with it. However, after hearing that Sidney Rigdon had been converted, he spent about six weeks in further investigation and scripture study and concluded that there was a need for prophets in all periods. He became satisfied that Joseph Smith was the “author” of the Book of Mormon (in other words, not a fraud),<sup>12</sup> and that the testimonies of the

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11. Identified as “Fragments of a history of the Mormons by John Corrill, 1839,” it is located in the John Fletcher Darby papers at the Missouri History Museum.

12. Note that the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon says, on the title page, “BY JOSEPH SMITH, JUNIOR, AUTHOR AND PROPRIETOR,” but the

eight witnesses were unimpeachable. After rehearsing all this, he briefly discussed the things that the Saints believed. Then, in a very revealing statement, he told of his joining the Church even though he still had reservations: “Although I was not fully satisfied, yet viewing this religion to be much nearer the religion of the Bible than any other I could find, I concluded to join the Church, with this determination, that if ever I found it to be a deception, I would leave it” (143).

The bulk of Corrill’s history focuses on the summer and fall of 1838, the period of what is often called the “Mormon War,” which ended with the expulsion of the Saints from Missouri. He had no sympathy with the mobs, but he began to be disillusioned with the Church when he saw the Saints themselves resorting to violence. He was particularly dismayed by the Danites. He was not sure how much the leaders of the Church were involved, but he suspected they were pulling the strings in the background. “How much he [Sampson Avard] was assisted by the presidency I know not, but I thought that they stood as wire workers behind the curtain. Be this as it may, they ran into awful extremes, for it seemed that they felt justified, and thought it was the will of God to use any measures whatever, whether lawful or unlawful, to accomplish their purpose, and put down those that opposed them” (167).

It is true that some Mormons used harsh defensive measures, including burning numerous buildings owned by their enemies in Daviess County.<sup>13</sup> It was these things that most disturbed Corrill, making him one of the Missouri dissenters. He said in self-justification for not speaking out more openly: “I knew that they were jealous of me as a dissenter, and that it was of no use for me to say any thing more; in fact I felt it was necessary for me to look out for my own safety. . . . I would have been

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preface makes it clear that he translated it from plates. Corrill was obviously saying here that he was convinced that Joseph was not a fraud.

13. For a complete study of the Mormon War in Missouri, see Alexander L. Baugh, “A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1996; Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2000). Chapter 6, “The Mormon Defense of De Witt,” and chapter 7, “The Mormon Defense of Daviess County, October 1838,” discuss some of the events that seemed to concern Corrill the most. Baugh also discusses this briefly in his fine overview article in the *Ensign*: “From High Hopes to Despair: The Missouri Period, 1831–1839,” *Ensign* 31 (July 2001): 44–55. He says, in part, “The entire conflict, known as the Mormon War, grew primarily out of religious intolerance by a significant portion of the local population residing in the northern counties, but a number of Latter-day Saints were also to blame for their involvement in hostilities against their neighbors” (49).



glad to have left the county with my family, but I could not get away; the decree was passed, and there was no other chance for me and the other dissenters but to pretend to take hold with the rest" (176–77).

Corrill's last two chapters briefly discuss some of the teachings and practices of the Church, usually in a fairly positive tone, but he concluded the final chapter with a few remarks to the members of the Church. Contrary to what he felt at the time of his conversion, he wrote, "I can see nothing that convinces me that God has been our leader" (197), and he listed several reasons for this disillusionment. Then, in a bitter effort to tell his former friends in the Church where to look for "deliverance," he said, "You may say, in God, but I say, in the exercise of common sense and that sound reason with which God has endowed you; and my advice is to follow that, in preference to those pretended visions and revelations which have served no better purpose than to increase your trouble, and which would bind you, soul and body, under the most intolerable yoke" (197). Corrill was officially excommunicated in March 1839, and he published his history about the same time. He died in 1843.

Quite the opposite tone is felt as one reads the fourth and final history in this volume: "A History, of the Persecution, of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter Day Saints in Missouri," an eleven-part series published in the *Times and Seasons* from December 1839 to October 1840. It originated with a letter written by Joseph Smith from jail in Liberty, Missouri, to the Saints and, in particular, to Bishop Edward Partridge. It admonished the Saints to gather all the facts relating to their suffering so they could be published to the world. The articles eventually published in the *Times and Seasons* presented a truly poignant, heartrending account of the Missouri persecutions. They did not discuss the reasons for the persecution: their entire focus was on the brutality of the persecution itself. Their work is worth reading, however, not just because they described the mistreatment of the Saints in such abundant detail, but also because they powerfully revealed the faith and feelings of the Saints at this juncture in their history. They briefly described some of the Saints' defensive efforts but did not mention the Danites or even imply that these defensive efforts were in any way unjustified. That is to be expected, for they were engaged in a major propaganda effort, attempting to gain the sympathy of the nation by placing before it the harshness of their treatment and their truly pitiable conditions as they were driven out of Missouri.

The first three installments were written by Bishop Partridge and covered the period through 1836. Like the authors of the other essays, he quickly glossed over all other aspects of Church history and got right

into the brutalities. He was especially vivid in his description of the Saints being driven from Jackson County, invoking language reminiscent of Thomas Paine's revolutionary rhetoric. He wrote: "These were times which tried men's souls; to stay where they were was death, and to undertake to remove so large a body at once, there being about ten or twelve hundred of them, looked like destruction of much property, if not of lives. It seemed, however, to be the only alternative" (218).

Unfortunately, Partridge became ill after finishing the first three installments, but the editors of the *Times and Seasons* considered the series so important that they continued it, apparently writing the fourth installment themselves. This very brief history quickly covered the period from the end of Partridge's account to the 1838 conflicts in Caldwell and adjoining counties.

The fifth installment consisted of excerpts from Parley P. Pratt's *History of the Late Persecutions Inflicted by the State of Missouri upon the Mormons*, published in Detroit in 1839. It began with a comment on Sidney Rigdon's fiery Fourth of July 1838 speech. As described by Pratt, Rigdon "painted, in lively colors" the oppressions suffered by the Saints and vowed that they would resist all oppression and maintain their rights and freedom guaranteed by the Constitution. "This declaration was received with shouts of hosannah to God and the Lamb," wrote Pratt approvingly, "and with many and long cheers by the assembled thousands, who were determined to yield their rights no more, except compelled by a superior power" (234).

The Saints' willingness to defend themselves was also a theme in the sixth installment, which came from Sidney Rigdon's *An Appeal to the American People: Being an Account of the Persecutions of the Church of Latter Day Saints; and of the Barbarities Inflicted on Them by the Inhabitants of the State of Missouri*, published in Cincinnati in 1840. Rigdon's chronology was often inaccurate, but his impassioned language portrays his attitude, and that of the Saints in general, during the final days of their Missouri persecutions. For example, after describing how their crops had been destroyed, their goods plundered, and their houses burned, he told of how they made appeal after appeal to the authorities for redress, "but none could be had." He then said that they had never retaliated but they were not disposed to move, "and seeing Gen. Parks [Hiram Parks, a Missouri militia leader who tried to defend the Mormons] was there, they appealed to him.— Parks replied, with an oath, 'go and give them a complete dressing, for you will never have any peace with them, until you do it; and I will stand between you and all difficulty'" (241). Accordingly,

Rigdon reported, David W. Patten took a hundred men and gave battle to the mobsters. The editors round out the story in a footnote, indicating that, beginning on October 18, 1838, Patten led an attack on Gallatin, Lyman Wight led one on Millport, and Seymour Branson led one on a settlement at Grindstone Fork.

For the seventh installment, the editors drew again from Pratt's *History of the Saints*, which provided more detail on a few things, including the death of David W. Patten at the Battle of Crooked River.

The eighth installment opened with Governor Lilburn W. Boggs's infamous extermination order, along with a brief introduction by the editors of the *Times and Seasons*. The balance of this and the next three installments were taken from Rigdon's *Appeal to the American People*. Included were his version of such familiar events as Missouri's General Alexander Doniphan's preventing the execution of Joseph Smith and others, the Hawm's Mill massacre (including detailed eyewitness accounts from John Young and David Lewis), events at Adam-ondi-Ahman, and the imprisonment and subsequent escape of Joseph Smith and others in Richmond. Rigdon's language throughout was intense, and at one point he made a statement that seems disingenuous. "In writing this narrative," he said, "it is no part of our intention to play upon the passions of the public, but give a faithful narrative of facts and then leave it." It seems apparent that the purpose of the *Appeal to the American People* was indeed to garner sympathetic support in the Mormon effort to gain redress, and is that not playing upon their passions? As Rigdon declared at the end:

But still we are, as a people, poor and destitute. We have been robbed of our all and many of us are without houses, living in tents and waggons. In consequence of our exposure, we have suffered this summer much sickness and numbers have died, and our prospects for the ensuing winter are gloomy. . . . Such is our true situation, and as such we make our Appeal to the American People. (282)

For their final installment, the editors of the *Times and Seasons* decided to reprint a speech given to the Missouri Saints at Far West on November 5, 1838, by Major General John B. Clark of the Missouri state militia. This was, indeed, a fitting conclusion to the terrible history of persecution, for there Clark affirmed his determination to carry out the governor's extermination order. Ordering the beleaguered Saints to leave the state immediately, he is reported to have said, in part:

Whatever your innocence, it is nothing to me. . . . The orders of the Governor to me were, that you should be exterminated, and not allowed to continue in the State, and had your leader not been given up and the

treaty complied with before this, you and your families would have been destroyed, and your houses in ashes.

There is a discretionary power vested in my hands which I shall try to exercise for a season. . . . but if I have to come again, because the treaty which you have made here shall be broken, you need not expect any mercy, but extermination. . . . As for your leaders, do not once think—do not imagine for a moment—do not let it enter your mind, that they will be delivered, or that you will see their faces again, for their fate is fixed, their die is cast—their doom is sealed. (283–84)

This appeared at the beginning of the October 1840 issue of the *Times and Seasons*. Toward the end of that issue, the editors included their own impassioned plea to their countrymen for something to be done. This concludes volume 2 of *Histories*.

### **A History of Faith**

Among other things, these two volumes in the Joseph Smith Papers series recount in more detail than previous compilations the horrendous persecutions suffered by the early Latter-day Saints. Readers will understand more of the Saints' impassioned reactions that followed the violence in Missouri and Illinois, more of the suffering and confusion arising from man's inhumanity to man. And yet, amid all the turmoil—whether it be the defection of John Corrill, the vehement speech of General Clark, or the persecutors driving the Mormons from place to place—the body of the Church remained steadfast. In studying these volumes, I could not help but reflect on how the faithfulness of those early Saints did so much to prepare the way for the marvelous blessings that I, as a Latter-day Saint, enjoy today. If for no other reason, I found these books well worth reading.

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James B. Allen is Professor of History Emeritus at Brigham Young University, former assistant Church historian, and a former senior research fellow at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History. His publications include his review of the Joseph Smith Papers, *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, found in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (2009) 152–61.