



2017

## Hosea Stout: Lawman, Legislator, Mormon Defender

Jay H. Buckley  
*Brigham Young University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Buckley, Jay H. (2017) "Hosea Stout: Lawman, Legislator, Mormon Defender," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 56 : Iss. 3 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol56/iss3/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

Stephen L. Prince. *Hosea Stout: Lawman, Legislator, Mormon Defender*.

Logan: Utah State University Press;  
Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2016.

*Reviewed by Jay H. Buckley*

**H**osea Stout presents a controversial, complicated, and surprisingly important figure in early Mormon and Utah history “due to his sharp temper and a number of self-admitted violent actions [but] he also was a devoted follower and defender of the faith who contributed to the church’s kingdom through persistence, reliability, and self-taught legal acumen” (xi).

A little more than fifty years ago, several events happened that brought the history of this remarkable and colorful nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint to life. First, the *Utah Historical Quarterly* published Hosea Stout’s two autobiographies edited by Reed A. Stout in 1962.<sup>1</sup> Then, two years later, historian Juanita Brooks published a two-volume edition of Hosea Stout’s diaries entitled *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*.<sup>2</sup> Stout’s diaries offered a descriptive and informative narrative of the Mormon exodus from Winter Quarters on the Missouri River across the plains to the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Historian Dale Morgan, who discovered the diaries in 1941, declared them “one of the most magnificent windows upon Mormon history ever opened.”<sup>3</sup>

Independent historian Stephen L. Prince edited and published *The Autobiography of Hosea Stout*,<sup>4</sup> which reprinted Reed Stout’s 1962

---

1. Reed A. Stout, ed., “Autobiography of Hosea Stout, 1810 to 1835,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 30, nos. 1–3 (Winter, Spring, Summer, 1962): 53–75; 149–74; 237–61; Reed A. Stout, ed., “Autobiography of Hosea Stout, 1810 to 1844,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 30 (Fall 1962): 333–44.

2. Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964).

3. Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, dust jacket.

4. Stephen L. Prince and Reed A. Stout, eds., *The Autobiography of Hosea Stout* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010).

autobiographies. Editing the autobiography enabled Prince to come to know Hosea Stout intimately. Moreover, it is always preferable when the person you are analyzing has put pen to paper, and Hosea Stout wrote a lot. Prince is no stranger to writing Mormon history, having received two awards from the Mormon History Association for his *Gathering in Harmony*,<sup>5</sup> which chronicled the saga of several southern Utah families, including the tale of his grandfather, Sheriff Antone B. Prince.

Prince's account of Hosea Stout offers the first complete biography of this controversial lightning rod who played such a significant role in early LDS and Utah history. He examines Stout's life with the thoroughness of a dental examination. Prince offers the big picture of how Stout fits within the larger framework of the Mormon founding and exodus, but he also identifies and extracts the core elements that defined Stout as a person, offering both the faults and virtues of someone Prince views as "one of the most important—and notorious—figures in the history of Mormon Nauvoo" (80).

Hosea Stout is important for several reasons. First, his life chronicled nearly the entire nineteenth-century Mormon experience. Stout joined the Latter-day Saints in 1838 in Missouri and continued with them to the Great Basin until his death in 1889, just a year before the Mormon Manifesto ended the practice of plural marriage. Second, Stout served as an eyewitness and recorder to so many critical events in nineteenth-century Mormon history. Moreover, his positions of authority and responsibility in civil and religious affairs enabled him to observe and record information unavailable to most other LDS diarists, chronicling the infighting and unrest that sometimes occurred among the hierarchy from the viewpoint of a rank-and-file member within their midst. The author includes the fact that Stout fought as a Danite against Missouri mobs in 1838. He moved with the body of Saints to Quincy, and then Nauvoo, serving as clerk to the high council, a bodyguard for Joseph Smith, and a leader of the Nauvoo Legion. He headed the police forces in Nauvoo and in Winter Quarters. Stout helped police the overland trail and provides an account as captain of the guard for Brigham Young's 1848 trek. Stout also participated in the first battle between Mormons and Utes at Battle Creek (Pleasant Grove) in 1849.

---

5. Stephen L. Prince, *Gathering in Harmony: A Saga of Southern Utah Families, Their Roots and Pioneering Heritage, and the Tale of Antone Prince, Sheriff of Washington County* (Spokane, Wash.: Arthur H. Clark, 2004).

Stout's civic responsibilities increased as he served in the Utah Territorial Legislature, helping codify and publish the territorial laws. He provided one of the most complete accounts of the Utah Territorial Legislature and served as Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1856–57. He served as a regent for the University of Deseret (University of Utah) and judge advocate for the Nauvoo Legion in Utah Territory. Brigham Young appointed Stout as the first attorney general for the State of Deseret. Stout later served as territorial prosecutor and a United States attorney for the Utah Territory. His service there offers a window into the legal battles of overland emigrants passing through Salt Lake City. He played an influential role as a U.S. attorney during the federal army's occupation of Utah in the late 1850s, fighting against antagonistic federal judges to defend the LDS Church and its leaders. Stout and his companions returned home early from the first LDS mission to China and Hong Kong after their unsuccessful effort to spread the gospel in Asia in 1853. He was also the oldest rescuer to assist the 1856 handcart pioneer companies.

One of Prince's most enlightening chapters traces how Stout's proclivity to violence stemmed from his childhood experiences on the Kentucky frontier. His abusive father, Joseph, alternated between chaining, whipping, and neglecting Hosea. Stout spent several traumatic boyhood years in a Shaker community that used flogging as a regular method to discipline children. After his mother, Anna, died when he was fourteen, Hosea's father abandoned him. Stout went to a Quaker community and prospered until he was provoked into several fistfights that ultimately placed him out of favor with the pacifists. He fought in the Black Hawk War in Illinois before joining the Latter-day Saints in 1838 to fight against Missouri mobs. Stout, "armed with 2 six shooters and a large Bowie knife all in sight," gained a reputation as always ready to dispense justice well before his conversion to Mormonism (124). "Significantly," Prince argues, "it was in the midst of the burgeoning hostilities [in Missouri] that Hosea Stout decided to become a Mormon" (153). Yet, although Mormonism did not create this violent man, Prince claims that "Mormon leaders put him in positions and gave him the permission to be violent, and he took full advantage of the opportunities" (159).

Prince juxtaposes Stout's violent tendencies to use force with his devotion as a tender, loving husband to several wives and father to numerous children, as well as his allegiance to the faith as a member of the Council of Fifty and the Quorum of the Seventy. Prince has done remarkable work using Stout's own words to paint an intimate portrait

of the complicated man as well as the historiographical work necessary to situate Stout within the historical context of his times. The prose is both engaging and compelling. *Hosea Stout: Lawman, Legislator, Mormon Defender* represents the definitive biography of this significant Mormon leader and serves as an indispensable resource for understanding nineteenth-century Mormon history.

---

Jay H. Buckley is Associate Professor of History at Brigham Young University. He is the recipient of the Charles Redd Center's Mollie and Karl G. Butler Young Scholar Award in Western Studies, and he has served as president of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. His publications include *Explorers of the American West: Mapping the World through Primary Documents* (2016), which he coauthored with Jeffery D. Nokes, and *William Clark: Indiana Diplomat* (2008).