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# The Office of Church Recorder

## A Conversation with Elder Steven E. Snow

*Keith A. Erekson*

Elder Steven E. Snow served as the Church Historian and Recorder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from August 1, 2012, to July 31, 2019. During this time, he oversaw significant developments in the work of Church history, from record keeping to publishing to developing historic sites and exhibits. Two years into his tenure, I joined the Church History Department as director of the Church History Library. One of my assignments in this role eventually involved participating in ongoing discussions about the office of Church Recorder. Over the years, there had been much discussion about the role of Church Historian, with far less about the role of Church Recorder.

The conversation that follows is a distillation of dozens of conversations that took place over many years. Its content draws on the research of many who worked before I joined the Church History Department and others who joined later. I present the conversation as an interview with Elder Snow both to emphasize his leadership into uncharted areas and to reflect our real-time process of asking, discussing, and pushing issues forward over time. In the footnotes, I supplement the conversation with citations to relevant sources and resources. Though we explored the variety of topics addressed herein in order to understand and guide our work, I hope the information will also be of value to the wider historical community.<sup>1</sup>

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1. I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and feedback I received for this article from Elder Steven E. Snow, Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr., Matthew J. Grow, Reid L. Neilson, Jennifer L. Lund, Alan Johnson, Joseph Monsen, and

The conversation opens with reflections on Elder Snow's service before moving to his process of learning about the office of Church Recorder. A brief history of Church record keeping is presented, beginning in the nineteenth century, when the offices of Church Historian and Church Recorder were separate and each was held by a different person. We then trace the modernization of record keeping during the twentieth century, the years spent without a Church Recorder, and the work in the twenty-first century. We close with a discussion of recent efforts that define the work of the Church Recorder today.

### Reflections on Snow's Service

*Keith A. Erekson:* You are wrapping up several years of leading the Church History Department as the Church Historian and Recorder. It has been an exciting period for Church history, marked by many significant accomplishments.<sup>2</sup> One of the most visible developments involves the publication of materials from our collection. What are some of the highlights, in your view?

*Elder Steven E. Snow:* It has, indeed, been a great privilege to serve as the Church Historian and Recorder for the past seven years.<sup>3</sup> During

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Wayne Crosby. The research and feedback from Brandon Metcalf, Tyson Thorpe, Robin Jensen, and Mark Buchanan have proven invaluable.

2. Elder Quentin L. Cook described some of the Church History Department's public accomplishments during Elder Snow's tenure and observed, "Under his wise leadership, we have collected more records than ever before and shared more of our history than ever before." Quentin L. Cook, "Out of Obscurity: How Merciful the Lord Has Been" (devotional address, Brigham Young University–Idaho, Rexburg, June 12, 2018), <https://www.byui.edu/devotionals/elder-quentin-l-cook-spring-2018>.

3. Elder Steven E. Snow (1949–) served as a member of the Seventy from 2001 to 2019, including a period in the Presidency of the Seventy (2007–12). He was announced as Church Historian and Recorder on January 10, 2012, and sustained on October 6, 2012; Joseph Walker, "Elder Snow Appointed as New LDS Church Historian," *Deseret News*, January 12, 2012, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700215000/Elder-Snow-appointed-as-new-LDS-Church-Historian.html?pg=all>; Henry B. Eyring, "The Sustaining of Church Officers," *Ensign* 42 (November 2012): 25. On Elder Snow's approach to Church history, see Richard E. Bennett and Dana M. Pike, "Start with Faith: A Conversation with Elder Steven E. Snow," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 3 (2013): 1–11; Steven E. Snow, "Balancing Church History," *New Era* 43 (June 2013): 20–23; Steven E. Snow, "Remember" (commencement address, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, April 23, 2015), [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/steven-e-snow\\_remember-2/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/steven-e-snow_remember-2/); and Steven E. Snow, "Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days,"



Keith A. Erekson (*left*) is the director of the Church History Library. Elder Steven E. Snow served as Church Historian and Recorder from August 2012 to July 2019. Courtesy Erekson and Snow, respectively. Snow photo © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

this time, we've seen many projects come to fruition that were years or even decades in the making. The Joseph Smith Papers Project has continued to publish volumes at a steady pace.<sup>4</sup> We've also published other significant documents from our past, including items from

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*Ensign* 48 (February 2018): 58–59. Church history often infused his devotional addresses; see, for example, Steven E. Snow, “Stepping-Stones and Stumbling Blocks” (speech, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, September 11, 2012), [https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/steven-e-snow\\_stepping-stones-and-stumbling-blocks/](https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/steven-e-snow_stepping-stones-and-stumbling-blocks/); and Steven E. Snow, “Be Thou Humble,” *Ensign* 46 (May 2016): 36–38; see also Steven E. Snow, “Skipping the Grand Canyon,” in *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community*, ed. Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1998), 242–44.

4. The Joseph Smith Papers Project is a comprehensive effort to gather, transcribe, annotate, and publish documents created by or under the direction of Joseph Smith. Many of the papers will be published in more than two dozen print volumes. The documents published in print as well as additional documents and reference materials are available online at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>. Between 2012 and 2019, the project published two volumes of histories (2012), one volume of journals (2015), the Council of Fifty minutes (2016), volumes on the Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon (2015) and Book of Abraham manuscripts (2018), and eight volumes of documents (2013–19).

the Relief Society's first fifty years of history,<sup>5</sup> sermons by Latter-day Saint women from the 1830s to the twenty-first century,<sup>6</sup> and the journal of George Q. Cannon.<sup>7</sup> We've also made many more of our materials available through the online Church history catalog. Since 2012, we've digitized more than fifteen million images and continue to add about three hundred images per hour. Earlier this year, we released a new version of our catalog to make it easier to find and view digital images.<sup>8</sup>

*Erekson:* How has increased accessibility to these materials benefited Church members?

*Snow:* All of these records, and the Joseph Smith Papers Project in particular, have provided us clearer views into our history. As a result, we prepared adjustments to the introductory headings to the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants in 2013.<sup>9</sup> We also prepared a series of essays that put the revelations into historical context and linked the essays to the online Gospel Doctrine curriculum materials during 2017.<sup>10</sup> A different series of "Gospel Topics Essays" was

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5. Jill Mulvay Derr and others, eds., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016). Document transcriptions and reference materials are available at <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/the-first-fifty-years-of-relief-society>.

6. Jennifer Reeder and Kate Holbrook, eds., *At the Pulpit: 185 Years of Discourses by Latter-day Saint Women* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2017). Document transcripts, reference materials, and extant audio recordings are available at <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/at-the-pulpit>.

7. The journal of George Q. Cannon spans from 1849 to 1901 and provides significant insight into the activities of the Church and Church leaders in the late nineteenth century. The journal's transcription together with reference materials is available at <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/george-q-cannon>.

8. The catalog is available online at <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/>. The Church History Library's blog, *The Historical Record*, features a monthly series on "Recently Digitized Collections," at <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/blog/the-historical-record>.

9. See "Church Releases New Editions of English Scriptures in Digital Formats," Scriptures, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/scriptures/press>; *Summary of Approved Adjustments for the 2013 Edition of the Scriptures* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 10–12, [https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/scriptures/approved-adjustments\\_eng.pdf](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bc/content/shared/content/english/pdf/scriptures/approved-adjustments_eng.pdf).

10. Matthew McBride and James Goldberg, eds., *Revelations in Context: The Stories behind the Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: The

published between 2013 and 2015 to provide answers about some of the more difficult aspects of our past.<sup>11</sup> A third initiative has been to write histories, called “Global Histories,” of the Church in individual countries.<sup>12</sup>

But the most significant publication for Church members is a new history of the Church, titled *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*. Volume 1 was published in September 2018 in fourteen languages, and work is under way on the remaining volumes. In addition to the narrative, we also published more than one hundred essays on historical topics to supplement the reading.<sup>13</sup>

*Erekson:* We’ve talked about publishing, but many people don’t know that the Church Historian and Recorder is also responsible for the Church’s art collection and historical museums. How have they developed in recent years?

*Snow:* We closed the Church History Museum for more than a year in order to install a new exhibit called *The Heavens Are Opened*, which corresponds with volume 1 of *Saints*. The exhibit features historical documents and artifacts as well as interactive experiences, such as a

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Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2016). The essays are also available at <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/landing/revelations-in-context>.

11. The essays are available online: “Gospel Topics Essays,” The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/essays>; see also “New Essays Address Topics on Women, Priesthood, Mother in Heaven,” Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 23, 2015, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/new-church-essays-women-priesthood-mother-in-heaven>.

12. The global histories are available online: “Global Histories,” Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/global-histories/introduction>.

13. *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, vol. 1, *The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), available online at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/title-page>; the historical topic essays are available at Church History Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/adam-ondi-ahman>; see also Snow, “Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days,” 58–59.

new video about the First Vision shown on a wraparound screen.<sup>14</sup> We also opened a new history center in Hamilton, New Zealand, with exhibits about the history of the Church in the Pacific.<sup>15</sup> And we placed rare and priceless historical documents on display in the Church History Library.<sup>16</sup>

*Erekson:* You also serve as chair of the Church's Historic Sites Committee, a group that brings together representatives from multiple departments at headquarters—including the Church History, Missionary, Temple, and Meetinghouse Facilities Departments—as well as the director of temporal affairs for historic sites. What are some of the highlights regarding historic sites during your time?

*Snow:* The most visible development was the creation of a new historic site in Pennsylvania that commemorates the priesthood restoration.<sup>17</sup>

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14. An interactive map of the new exhibit is available online: “The Heavens Are Opened—an Interactive Map,” Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/maps/the-heavens-are-opened>; the video on the First Vision is available at “Ask of God: Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” Gospel Media, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media-library/video/2017-01-0100-ask-of-god-joseph-smiths-first-vision>.

15. Learn more at “Matthew Cowley Pacific Church History Centre,” Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/section/matthew-cowley-pacific-church-history-centre>.

16. High-resolution images of the documents may be viewed online at “Foundations of Faith,” Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/exhibit/foundations-of-faith>; see also “New Church History Library Foundations of Faith Exhibit,” Church News, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/events/new-church-history-library-foundations-of-faith-exhibit>; R. Scott Lloyd, “Foundations of Faith’: Church History Library Exhibits Treasures from Its Documents Collection,” *Church News*, September 7, 2014, 8–9, 13; and Keith A. Erekson, “New Treasures Added to Church History Library ‘Foundations of Faith’ Exhibit,” *Church News*, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, February 9, 2016, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/new-treasures-added-to-church-history-library-foundations-of-faith-exhibit>.

17. Information and directions to the Priesthood Restoration Site are available at “Priesthood Restoration Site,” Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/subsection/historic-sites/pennsylvania/priesthood-restoration-site>; see also “President Nelson Dedicates Priesthood Restoration Site,” Newsroom, The

We've done a lot of master planning at many of our sites throughout the United States. Close to my own heart and heritage, the historic tabernacle in St. George, Utah, was renovated.<sup>18</sup> And most recently, the responsibility for operations of the Church's historic sites has shifted from the Missionary Department to the Church History Department—a move that we welcome.

*Erekson:* It is always the case that public actions like these are the result of largely invisible work behind the scenes. Are there any less visible developments that you'd like to mention?

*Snow:* Yes. We have done a lot to globalize the work of our department. Since 2010, we have been calling area Church history advisers throughout the world, who have collected records, conducted oral histories with living Saints in their home countries, and helped increase the submission of annual histories by 20 percent. Since 2012, we've established secure record preservation centers in more than two dozen places around the world to store records according to local laws and customs. We also began hiring Church History Department employees who live and work in their home countries. The first three were hired in Peru, South Africa, and Mexico, and we'll add more in the coming months. These volunteers and employees have helped create exhibits, host commemorative events, and prepare online publications in their countries. They have also helped us collect far more international records than ever before. In any given year, we collect records about the Church in sixty to seventy different countries.

A second, less visible area in which we've made great strides involves our digital-record storage. In 2015, ten years of planning culminated in retrofitting two chambers of the Granite Mountain Record Vault with servers to house the Church's digital-record preservation system that we administer. The facility reopened in December of that year with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and addresses by Elder Quentin L. Cook and Bishop Dean Davies. We also strengthened our

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Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, September 19, 2015, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/president-nelson-dedicates-priesthood-restoration-site>.

18. Information and directions to the St. George Tabernacle are available at "St. George Tabernacle," Church History, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/subsection/historic-sites/utah/st-george/st-george-tabernacle>; see also Jeff Richards, "Newly Renovated St. George Tabernacle Opens to Public Tours," *St. George [Utah] News*, July 23, 2018.



digital preservation efforts by storing copies of our records on servers located outside the Intermountain West.

### **Learning about the Office of Church Recorder**

*Erekson:* Underlying all of these public accomplishments and behind-the-scenes developments, you wrestled with a question about the office of Church Recorder. How did you encounter this question?

*Snow:* It's actually a question that I inherited from my predecessor, Elder Marlin K. Jensen. He frequently told the story of his call as Church Historian and Recorder and said, "As President Hinckley extended the call, I had the presence of mind to ask him what his expectations of me as Church Historian were. He said crisply, 'That you read the scriptures and do your duty!' I then asked, 'And what about the office of recorder?' He replied, 'I haven't given that a bit of thought, but you'd better!'" Elder Jensen did study the scriptures and gave the subject a lot of thought. As a result, he oversaw the revitalization of the Church's records management program and the institution of electronic systems for preserving digital records.<sup>19</sup> But he felt there was still more to the question, and when I was called, he urged me to continue to think about the office of Recorder.

*Erekson:* How did you then take up the quest?

*Snow:* In the beginning, I mostly just worried about it. I knew that the records of the Church were being created all around the world. When I served as the Area President of the Africa Southeast Area, headquartered in Johannesburg, South Africa, I inherited a closet full of records, which we shipped back to Church headquarters for safe-keeping. I also knew that the majority of the records being created in the twenty-first century are digital. I wondered how we would collect and preserve all of the emails, electronic documents, information in

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19. Marlin K. Jensen, "Minding the House of Church History: Reflections of a Church Historian at the End of His Time," *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 81; see also 86–87. On Elder Jensen's tenure in the office, see Marlin K. Jensen and David F. Boone, "A Historian by Yearning: A Conversation with Elder Marlin K. Jensen," *Religious Educator* 8, no. 3 (2007): 1–13; Marlin K. Jensen, "There Shall Be a Record Kept among You," *Ensign* 37 (December 2007): 28–33; and Marlin K. Jensen, "Making a Case for Church History," in *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints*, ed. Steven C. Harper and Richard E. Turley (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010), 1–18.

databases, and web materials that are created or updated every day. For me, the turning point from worry to understanding came during a meeting in December 2015.

*Erekson:* I remember that meeting very well. You gave me advanced notice to gather all of the information we could find about the office of the Church Recorder, the people who had held it, what they had done, and the current status of all significant Church records.<sup>20</sup> Then, for three hours, you, the assistant executive director of the department, and the Assistant Church Historian—three trained lawyers—cross-examined me about the past, present, and future of Church records!

*Snow:* Yes, it was an intense three hours. But I came out of that conversation feeling much more hopeful.

*Erekson:* I see in the meeting's minutes that Richard Turley said, "This will be a meeting we look back on as being important." You summarized the information as being "more than I've learned about the Recorder's office in four years."<sup>21</sup> What are some of the insights that struck you as being most important?

*Snow:* I came to see the office of Church Recorder as being complementary and connected to the office of Church Historian. The recorder operates in the present by looking forward to the future; he records modern transactions (such as ordinances), decisions (in meetings), and activities (such as missionary or temple service). The recorder ensures that records are kept now and certifies that what has been kept is accurate and complete. The historian also operates in the present and fulfills his role by looking back on the gathered records to discern trends over time and offer retrospective analysis. What is gathered under the recorder function can later be put to service under the historian function.

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20. The gathering of materials was supported by the research and conversational guidance of Brandon Metcalf, Tyson Thorpe, Richard Turley, Robin Jensen, Richard Jensen, Mark Buchanan, Daryl Downs, Josh Bullough, Jim Madsen, Audrey Spainhower, Mary Teresa Anderson, Vivian Wellman, Jennifer Barkdull, Bruce Searle, Joseph Monsen, Wayne Crosby, Alan Johnson, Patrick Dunshee, Jared Mackey, Aly Conteh, Gary Jestice, James Findlay, Reid Neilson, departmental records coordinators, and many others past and present.

21. Minutes of December 2015 meeting in possession of author. At the time of the meeting, Turley was serving as an Assistant Church Historian and Recorder.

*Erekson:* So the recorder does his work in the present moment, making official records of current transactions, whereas the historian looks back over the long-term, making retrospective interpretations and finding future uses.

*Snow:* That's right. Gathered records can be used in leadership and decision-making, to inspire or motivate, to defend the Church against legal challenges, or to publish the truth through historical research and writing. We see this pattern illustrated in the Book of Mormon as Nephi, Jacob, Alma, and others made records, often without knowing all of the reasons why. Then, hundreds of years later, Mormon drew from those records to compile an abridged history, sometimes quoting directly from previous writings, sermons, and letters and other times offering his own commentary and analysis.

*Erekson:* As your comment about the Book of Mormon suggests, our sacred records inform our modern record-keeping practices. In Church history, we take a rather broad definition of the term *record*, going back to the day the Church was organized.

*Snow:* Yes. On that day Joseph Smith was told, "Behold, there shall be a record kept among you" (D&C 21:1). That was the initial message that forms the foundation for all our work.

*Erekson:* Over time, we have come to see in that scripture the guidance for keeping artwork, artifacts, physical places, historical manuscripts, photographs, printed materials, audiovisual materials, and day-to-day records generated in the course of Church business. What other scriptures have informed your understanding of the work of the Recorder?

*Snow:* The year after the Church was organized, John Whitmer was commanded to "keep the church record and history continually," to "travel many times from place to place, and from church to church, that he may the more easily obtain knowledge," and to do it "for the good of the church, and for the rising generations that shall grow up on the land of Zion, to possess it from generation to generation" (D&C 47:3; 69:7-8). The Saints were commanded to record the names of Church members, "that which the prophets and apostles have written," questions asked and decisions made, accounts of personal ministry and stewardship, and genealogical records (D&C 20:82; 52:9; 69:5-6; 70:3-6; 72:5-6; 102:23; 128:24). Local clerks were instructed to record "a history, and a general church record of all

things that transpire in Zion,” including donations, receipts of assistance, and notes on the “manner of life, their faith, and works,” and those who left the Church (D&C 85:1–2). After the Saints were expelled from Missouri, they were commanded to collect magazines, encyclopedias, and histories published about our experiences and history (see D&C 123:1–6). And, of course, temple ordinances: “When any of you are baptized for your dead, let there be a recorder, and let him be eye-witness of your baptisms; let him hear with his ears, that he may testify of a truth, saith the Lord; That in all your recordings it may be recorded in heaven” (D&C 127:6–7). The last part of that verse emphasizes that for the work of salvation to be complete, its records must be kept.

*Erekson:* So there is a theology behind our record keeping. We believe that records are part of the expression of our faith.

*Snow:* When Joseph Smith spoke of the final judgment, he taught that the dead would be judged from records kept in heaven and on earth. “Whatsoever you record on earth shall be recorded in heaven,” he said. And significantly, “Whatsoever you do not record on earth shall not be recorded in heaven” (D&C 128:6–8). It is imperative that we keep records.

*Erekson:* After that important first meeting, we continued to meet each month. How did your thinking unfold?

*Snow:* We began by identifying every significant type of record that we would want to preserve in our archives. We also continued to explore the history of the office, looking at the work done by previous Church Recorders and the precedents they established for today. One of the most important precedents arose while Joseph Smith lived in Nauvoo and Church members lived throughout the eastern United States and Canada, the British Isles, and the isles of the Pacific. In that context, Joseph observed that “it would be very difficult for one recorder to be present at all times, and to do all the business.” Thus, he instructed that “there can be a recorder appointed in each ward of the city. . . . Then, let there be a general recorder, to whom these other records can be handed, being attended with certificates over their own signatures, certifying that the record they have made is true” (D&C 128:3–4). This translates into a twenty-first century need for the Church Recorder to teach good principles of record keeping to all who create and use records worldwide.

*Erekson*: Why don't we take each of these significant topics in turn? We'll begin with a brief history of record keeping, then look at the efforts to define the work of the Church Recorder in the twenty-first century.

### A Brief History of Record Keeping

*Erekson*: We've done a lot of research and have the results, so let's go back to the beginning.<sup>22</sup> The terms *clerk*, *scribe*, *secretary*, and *recorder* were used by the early Saints as well as by their contemporaries.<sup>23</sup> How did record keeping occur in the earliest days of the Church's history?

*Snow*: Joseph responded to the commandment to keep a record by appointing temporary record keepers who were often called clerks. For example, at the Church's first conference in June 1830, Oliver

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22. A full history of the Church's historical record keeping has not been prepared, though many helpful studies have been made, including A. William Lund, "The Church Historian's Office," *Improvement Era* 38, no. 4 (April 1935): 216, 245–46; Charles P. Adams and Gustive O. Larson, "A Study of the LDS Church Historian's Office, 1830–1900," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 370–89; Donald T. Schmidt, "The Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Genealogical Journal* 2, no. 2 (June 1973): 62–65; Glenn N. Rowe, "The Historical Department and Library of the LDS Church," in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 154–71; Marlin K. Jensen, "Church History: Past, Present and Future," *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 20–42; Richard E. Turley and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010); Reid L. Neilson and R. Mark Melville, eds., *A Historian in Zion: The Autobiography of Andrew Jensen, Assistant Church Historian* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2016); and Robin Scott Jensen, "Archives of the Better World: The Nineteenth-Century Historian's Office and Mormonism's Archival Flexibility" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 2019).

23. The editors of the Joseph Smith Papers observed, "In early Mormon usage, though the distinctions were not always clear, a 'scribe' usually kept records such as revelations, translations, correspondence, and journal entries; a 'clerk' kept minutes of conferences, councils, and other meetings; and a 'recorder' created or certified official institutional documents. The title of 'recorder,' with its legal implications, was probably borrowed from the contemporaneous terminology of government record keeping." "Joseph Smith's Historical Enterprise," n. 7, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/intro/series-introduction-for-the-histories-series>.

Cowdery was appointed to “keep the Church record and Conference minutes until the next conference.” When Oliver was called on a mission in October, the assignment passed to others including John Corrill, Newel K. Whitney, Orson Hyde, and William W. Phelps.<sup>24</sup> This practice of calling temporary clerks continued even after John Whitmer was appointed in 1831 “to write and keep a regular history.”<sup>25</sup>

*Erekson:* Because of his assignment, John Whitmer has been viewed as the first Church Historian.<sup>26</sup> But the task of record keeping did not fall entirely to him. What other record-keeping activities happened at this time?

*Snow:* For one thing, the practice of appointing temporary record keepers at conferences continued.<sup>27</sup> Sometimes John Whitmer served as the temporary clerk of a conference. Oliver Cowdery’s name appears often in the records. And, in time, as the Church grew and moved to Ohio, record keepers began keeping the minutes of council meetings, records of ordinations and licenses, membership records, and the text of patriarchal blessings.<sup>28</sup>

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24. “Minute Book 2,” 1 (June 9, 1830); 6–7 (August 2, 1831); 7 (September 24, 1831); 7–8 (October 10, 1831), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/3>; “Minutes, 1 October 1831,” Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minutes-1-october-1831/1>.

25. In March 1831, John Whitmer was appointed to “write and keep a regular history” and “to keep the church record and history continually; for Oliver Cowdery I have appointed to another office.” Doctrine and Covenants 47:1, 3; see also “Historical Introduction” to “John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847,” Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/john-whitmer-history-1831-circa-1847/28#historical-intro>.

26. See, for example, Marlin K. Jensen, “LDS Church History: Past, Present, and Future,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 20–42; Dean C. Jessee, “The Writing of Joseph Smith’s History,” *BYU Studies* 11, no. 4 (Summer 1971): 439–73; and Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Smith and the Beginning of Mormon Record Keeping,” in *The Prophet Joseph: Essays on the Life and Mission of Joseph Smith*, ed. Larry C. Porter and Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 138–60.

27. For examples of conference record keepers, see “Minute Book 2,” 6 (September 6, 12, 1831; October 1, 1831), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/8>.

28. Cowdery identifies himself in 1834 as the “Clerk and Recorder” in a patriarchal blessing. “Blessing from Joseph Smith Sr., 9 December 1834,” 5, Joseph

## Development of the Office of Church Recorder

*Erekson:* When and how did the shift occur from temporary appointments to a standing appointment?

*Snow:* In September 1835, Oliver Cowdery was appointed as the “recorder for the church.”<sup>29</sup> He had been the first person appointed to a temporary record-keeping role in 1830, and he held this new Churchwide position for two years.

*Erekson:* The existence of a formal record keeper added a dimension of authority to the Church’s records. Every institution needs to be able to trust its records in order to carry out its day-to-day work. What kinds of records did Oliver Cowdery create and use?

*Snow:* During his time, Oliver kept minutes of general conferences and the Kirtland high council; he wrote entries in Joseph Smith’s journal, and he recorded patriarchal blessings.<sup>30</sup> He also published historical records while serving as editor of the *Evening and Morning Star*.<sup>31</sup>

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Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/blessing-from-joseph-smith-sr-9-december-1834/3>, underlining in original.

29. “Minute Book 1” (Kirtland High Council minute book), 107–8 (September 14, 1835), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-1/111#X5DC3AFA7-7FC3-4682-A442-EAA9E3053E51>. Cowdery was released from the role on September 17, 1837, but was later appointed as a “standing Clerk” for a high council. “Minute Book 1,” 242 (September 17, 1837), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-1/246>; “Minute Book 2,” 87 (December 6–7, 1837), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/89#X2AF669EC-9801-4919-B092-7FE1B8339A24>.

30. Jesse, “Writing of Joseph Smith’s History,” 441–42. Cowdery had written for Joseph Smith since April 1829. “Revelation, April 1829–D [D&C 9],” 20, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-april-1829-d-dc-9/1>.

31. Cowdery had previously authored eight letters on the early history of the Church, which were published serially in the *Latter Day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* and may have been based upon a narrative history written by Cowdery. The letters have been republished in Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844*, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 38–89.

*Erekson:* Looking back from your position in the twenty-first century, what precedents were established during Cowdery's tenure as the first Church Recorder?

*Snow:* The most important precedent was the establishment of a Church-wide office that continued to be filled after Oliver was released. He created records, and he also cared for general Church records, such as general conference minutes, official communications, and the revelations. I also think it is significant that he began to use the records to help publish correct information. We don't keep the records just to keep them. We keep them to advance the work of the Church.

*Erekson:* Cowdery was followed in the office of Church Recorder by George W. Robinson (1837–40),<sup>32</sup> who helped gather affidavits about the expulsion from Missouri, and by Robert B. Thompson (1840–41),<sup>33</sup> who helped prepare the redress petition to Congress.<sup>34</sup> But through all this, the parallel office of Church Historian was held

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32. Robinson was sustained as "General Clerk & recorder of the whole Church" on September 17, 1837. "Minute Book 1," 242. No surviving record documents his release.

33. Thompson was sustained as "general church clerk" on October 3, 1840, at which time it was noted that Robinson intended to move to Iowa. "Minutes of the General Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Held in Nauvoo, Hancock County, Ill. Oct., 3rd 1840," *Times and Seasons* 1, no. 12 (October 1840): 185. Thompson died in office on August 27, 1841; WM. Law, "Death of Col. Robert B. Thompson," *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 21 (September 1841): 519. Thompson was succeeded by James Sloan, who was sustained as "general church clerk" on October 1, 1841, and served until leaving for a mission to Ireland on July 30, 1843; "Minutes of a Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Held in Nauvoo. Ill., Commencing Oct. 1st, 1841," *Times and Seasons* 2, no. 24 (October 1841): 577; Andrew Jenson, "Sloan, James," in *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901–36), 1:254.

34. The petitions, also known as the "Missouri Claims," listed grievances suffered by the Saints in Missouri, 1833–1839. "Mormon Redress Petitions, 1839–1845," Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; some were compiled in *Mormon Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict*, ed. Clark V. Johnson (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992).



successively by John Whitmer (1831–38),<sup>35</sup> John Corrill (1838–39),<sup>36</sup> and Elias Higbee (1838–42).<sup>37</sup> How did the two offices come together?

*Snow*: They came together during the tenure of Willard Richards (1842–54). He had been called as an Apostle in 1840, and then in quick succession he was appointed the Nauvoo city recorder, the clerk of the Nauvoo municipal court, and the recorder for the Nauvoo Temple.<sup>38</sup> Then in late 1842 he was appointed as Joseph Smith’s private secretary

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35. Whitmer was called as Church Historian on March 8, 1831; sustained on April 9, 1831; and released on March 10, 1838, when he was excommunicated. “Revelation, circa 8 March 1831-B [D&C 47],” 79, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-circa-8-march-1831-b-dc-47/1>; “Minute Book 2,” 3 (April 9, 1831), accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/5>; “Minute Book 2,” 105 (March 10, 1838), accessed August 19, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/107>; see also “Historical Introduction” to “John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847,” accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/john-whitmer-history-1831-circa-1847/5#historical-intro>.

36. Corrill was sustained as Church Historian on April 6, 1838, and served until November 1838 (when he apostatized) or March 1839 (when he was excommunicated). “Minute Book 2,” 114 (April 6, 1838), accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/117>; “History, 1838–1856, Volume C-1,” 899, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-c-1-2-november-1838-31-july-1842/80>.

37. Higbee was sustained as Church Historian on April 6, 1838, and served until his death on June 8, 1843. “Minute Book 2,” 114 (April 6, 1838), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/minute-book-2/117>; Andrew Jenson, “Higbee, Elias,” in *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:253.

38. See Nauvoo (Ill.) Recorder Marriage Certificates, 1842–1846, MS 16824, Church History Library; “History of Willard Richards,” *Deseret News*, June 30, 1858, 77; and “Notice, 15 December 1841,” 638, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/notice-15-december-1841/1>. In July 1843, Joseph M. Cole was appointed recorder for baptisms of the dead and Jonathan H. Hale was appointed assistant temple recorder. Joseph Smith, Journal, July 30, 1843, in *Journals, Volume 3: May 1843–June 1844*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rodgers, Joseph Smith Papers (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2015), 69; and “Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 3, 15 July 1843–29 February 1844,” [24], Joseph Smith Papers, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-3-15-july-1843>

and historian and the following July as the Church Recorder.<sup>39</sup> Richards retained both roles until his death in 1854, even while becoming a member of the First Presidency and serving as secretary of Utah Territory.<sup>40</sup>

*Erekson:* So now that the two roles were united, what did Elder Richards do?

*Snow:* Between the time of Richards's call as temple recorder and his call as Church Recorder, Joseph sent a letter, dated September 6, 1842, and now found in Doctrine and Covenants 128, that instructed local clerks "in each ward of the city" to create precise records of things for which they were "eye-witness." These records were to be handed over with signatures to the "general church recorder," who would "enter the record on the general church book."<sup>41</sup> Elder Richards

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-29-february-1844/30; Nauvoo Ninth Ward High Priests minutes, November 1844–February 1945, 3, Church History Library.

39. Joseph Smith, "Journal, December 1842–June 1844; Book 1, 21 December 1842–10 March 1843," 1 (December 21, 1842), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-december-1842-june-1844-book-1-21-december-1842-10-march-1843/7>; Willard Richards, journal, vol. 9, December 21, 1842; July 30, 1843, Willard Richards journals and papers, 1821–1854, Church History Library.

40. He was sustained as both on October 6, 1845, and died in office on March 11, 1854. See "Historic Men Served as Church Historians," *Church News*, February 14, 1970, 15; and Orson Spencer, "Death of Our Beloved Brother Willard Richards," *Deseret News*, March 16, 1854, 2.

41. Doctrine and Covenants 128:2–4, from "Letter from Joseph Smith," September 6, 1842, published in *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 23 (October 1, 1842): 934. Traces of the practice date to August 1838, under the tenure of George W. Robinson, when membership records kept by branches were to be forwarded to stakes for the "general Church Record." "To the Saints gathering into Zion," *Elders' Journal*, August 1838, 62, Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-august-1838/14>. Also in 1838, the First Presidency and Church Recorder began signing priesthood licenses and maintaining a record of licenses issued and revoked. "Resolution, circa 8 April 1838," 19, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/resolution-circa-8-april-1838/1>; George W. Robinson, "Notice," *Elders' Journal*, August 1838, 62. For a sample license, see "License for Gardner Snow, 19 January 1839," Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/license-for-gardner-snow-19-january-1839/1>. Branch clerks began keeping marriage records in 1835. "Appendix 3: Statement on Marriage, circa August 1835," 251,

played a role in implementing this practice. In Nauvoo, he recorded the donations of individual Saints in the Book of the Law of the Lord, and he recorded the names of Church members who arrived or were baptized in the city.<sup>42</sup> When the Saints crossed the plains, it was Elder Richards who oversaw the transportation by wagon, taking inventory of records loaded in Illinois and unloaded in the Salt Lake Valley.

*Erekson:* I'll return again to the precedent question. How does Elder Richards's service influence the work of the office of Church Recorder today?

*Snow:* Since the time of Willard Richards, the offices of Historian and Recorder have been connected. As records are created throughout the world, the Recorder bears a centralized responsibility to gather and certify the records created by others. Elder Richards pioneered some of the important central functions of record keeping, such as receiving, certifying, inventorying, and protecting the records.

### **The Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries**

*Erekson:* After the varieties of roles and assignments in the early years, and after the general disruption of moving the Saints and their records to Utah, the work of record keeping over the next century proceeded with several general continuities. What did record keeping look like during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

*Snow:* Two general conditions stand out as being significant to me. First, Apostles continued to fill the combined office of Church Historian and Recorder, including George A. Smith (1854–70),<sup>43</sup> Albert Carrington

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Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix-3-statement-on-marriage-circa-august-1835/1>; included in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants as section 101.

42. See "Far West and Nauvoo elders' certificates, 1837–1838, 1840–1846," CR 100 402, Church History Library.

43. George A. Smith served as an Apostle 1839–75 (including time as a counselor in the First Presidency, 1868–75) and was sustained as "Church Historian and General Church Recorder" on April 7, 1854; he was released on October 8, 1870, "Minutes," *Deseret News*, April 13, 1854, [2]; "Fortieth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Deseret News*, October 12, 1870, 419.

(1870–74),<sup>44</sup> Orson Pratt (1874–81),<sup>45</sup> Wilford Woodruff (1883–89),<sup>46</sup> Franklin D. Richards (1889–99),<sup>47</sup> and Anthon H. Lund (1900–1921).<sup>48</sup> Assistants were also called from among the Twelve initially—Wilford Woodruff (1856–83) and Franklin D. Richards (1884–89).<sup>49</sup> The

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44. Albert Carrington served as an Apostle 1870–85 (including time as a counselor in the First Presidency, 1873–1877) and was sustained as Church Historian and Recorder on October 8, 1870; he was released on May 9, 1874. “Fortieth Semi-annual Conference of the Church,” 419; Historical Department office journal, 1844–2012, 31:137 (October 8, 1870), CR 100 1, Church History Library; “Forty-Fourth Annual Conference,” *Deseret News*, May 13, 1874, 232.

45. Orson Pratt served as an Apostle 1835–42 and 1843–81 and was sustained as Church Historian and Recorder on May 9, 1874; he died in office on October 3, 1881. “Forty-Fourth Annual Conference,” 232; “Death of Apostle Orson Pratt,” *Deseret News*, October 5, 1881, 568; “Death of Orson Pratt,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, October 4, 1881, 4.

46. Wilford Woodruff served as an Apostle 1839–98 (including time as President of the Church, 1889–98) and was sustained as Church Historian and Recorder on October 7, 1883; he served until becoming president of the Church on April 7, 1889. “Fifty-Third Semi-annual Conference,” *Deseret News*, October 10, 1883, 604; Historical Department office journal, 39:178; “General Conference,” *Deseret [News] Weekly*, April 13, 1889, 487. He served as the Assistant Church Historian and Recorder from October 6, 1856, to October 7, 1883, when he became “Historian and General Church Recorder.” “Minutes of the Semi-annual Conference,” *Deseret News*, October 15, 1856, 256; “Fifty-Third Semi-annual Conference,” 604.

47. Franklin D. Richards served as an Apostle 1849–99 and was sustained as Church Historian and Recorder on April 7, 1889; he died in office on December 9, 1899. He served as Assistant Church Historian and Recorder from April 6, 1884, to April 7, 1889. “General Conference,” 487; Historical Department office journal, 46:319; “Franklin D. Richards Dead,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 9, 1899, 1.

48. Anthon H. Lund served as an Apostle 1889–1921 (including time as a counselor in the First Presidency, 1901–21) and was sustained as Church Historian and Recorder at a meeting of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve on July 26, 1900, and by the Church membership on October 7, 1900. He died in office on March 2, 1921. Anthon H. Lund, journals, 1860–1921, 18:210 (July 26, 1900), MS 5375, Church History Library; Historical Department office journal, vol. 53, July 26, 1900; “Third Day,” in *Seventy-First Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1900), 42; J. M. Sjodahl, “President Anthon H. Lund,” *Improvement Era* 24, no. 6 (April 1921): 499.

49. Some Assistant Church Historians and Recorders later became Apostles, including Charles W. Penrose (in the assistant office 1896–1904), Orson F. Whitney (1899–1906), and Joseph Fielding Smith (1906–21).

Quorum of the Twelve oversaw record keeping and conducted formal reviews of records and record-keeping practices in 1881 and 1908.<sup>50</sup>

*Erekson:* What was the second condition?

*Snow:* Second, the responsibility for record keeping continued to be delegated beyond the Church Recorder, even though a few centralized activities began to occur. For example, early in the twentieth century the Presiding Bishop's office centralized the administration of financial and membership records.<sup>51</sup> And as temples were built in St. George (1877), Logan (1884), Manti (1888), Salt Lake City (1893), Hawaii (1919), and Canada (1923), paper-based temple records were stored in the temples. Then, clerks from the Historian's Office would make copies for long-term storage.<sup>52</sup>

*Erekson:* The construction of multiple temples prompted the need to keep a new category of records that had not previously been collected in an organized way—genealogical records. How was the Church Historian and Recorder involved?

*Snow:* The Genealogical Society of Utah was organized in 1894 to gather genealogical records. Its first meeting was held in the Church Historian's Office, and the society's first president was the Church Historian and Recorder, Elder Franklin D. Richards. The genealogical records were kept physically separate from other historical records from the outset. In the Church Historian's Office, they were stored in a separate room (1894–1917). When the historical and genealogical records were moved to the new Church Administration Building in 1917, they were kept on separate floors. After 1934, genealogical records were moved to a separate facility.<sup>53</sup>

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50. Joseph F. Smith, Francis M. Lyman, and John Henry Smith to the First Presidency, September 17, 1881; as quoted in Adams and Larson, "Study of the LDS Church Historian's Office," 382. See a later study in John Henry Smith, Heber J. Grant, and Rudger Clawson to Joseph F. Smith, May 19, 1908, Church History Library.

51. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 99–100, 105–6.

52. Temple records were kept on paper in temples until the 1980s. The Temple Department was created in 1979. See James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, and Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894–1994* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 310–11.

53. Genealogical records were accessible in facilities on 80 North Main (1934–62), in an abandoned Montgomery Ward building (1962–71), in the west wing of the Church Office Building (1972–85), and in the Family History

*Erekson:* Meanwhile, the traditional historical activities of publishing, gathering records and information, and organizing the records for better research access continued during this time.

*Snow:* Yes. The work that began under Joseph Smith's direction to compile a manuscript history was continued after his death by those who held the office of Church Historian and Recorder.<sup>54</sup> They then moved on to compile a manuscript history of Brigham Young and later supported the work of Assistant Church Historian and Recorder B. H. Roberts in preparing the *Comprehensive History of the Church*, which was published for the Church's centennial in 1930.<sup>55</sup>

*Erekson:* And the Church continued to create records as it carried out its business. How did the Historian's Office continue to gather contemporary records?

*Snow:* Various initiatives were undertaken to collect information about events, people, foreign missions, local units, and local leaders. Historic sites were visited, pieces of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon were acquired, statistical data from temples were assembled, and missionaries' biographical information was recorded in a central "missionary register."<sup>56</sup> Under the direction of the Twelve

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Library (1985–present). In 1944, the society was reincorporated as a correlated Church institution and then restructured as an auxiliary in 1961, with Junius Jackson as president; Howard W. Hunter served as president 1964–72, including a two-year overlap as Church Historian and Recorder. In 1975, the auxiliary became a Church department. See Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 44–49, 84, 93, 124, 141–42, 168–70, 174, 195–97, 266–68, 297–98.

54. Joseph Smith Jr. and others, "History, 1838–1856 (Manuscript History of the Church)," 7 vols. (A-1, B-1, C-1, C-1 addenda, D-1, E-1, F-1), Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 8, 2019, <http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/the-papers/histories/jspph3/jspph3-sub1>; Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1902–32).

55. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930). Roberts served as a member of the Seventy 1888–1933 and was sustained as an Assistant Church Historian and Recorder on April 6, 1902; he died in office on September 27, 1933. "General Authorities of the Church," in *Seventy-Second Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902), 84; Andrew Jenson, comp., *Church Chronology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1914), xxxiv; "B. H. Roberts' Funeral Sunday," *Deseret News*, September 28, 1933, 1.

56. See Historian's Office temple ordinance compilations, 1888–1980, CR 100 242, Church History Library; and Historian's Office temple ordinance compilations, 1877–1984, CR 100 244, Church History Library.

Apostles and through the Committee on Church Records, an annual “Record Day” was celebrated beginning in 1900 to encourage stake presidents to review local records of membership, ordinations, infant blessings, and temple recommends. The purpose of the review was to ensure that Church units were keeping records using the most up-to-date forms.<sup>57</sup>

*Erekson:* Employing a practice common in libraries of the era, manuscript collections were separated into name and subject files. How were the records used internally?

*Snow:* The collections were limited to primarily internal use after 1882, which was and is the norm for private archives built to serve institutional needs. And work began on the massive “Journal History of the Church” in 1906. This day-by-day chronology of Church history is an index to many kinds of records, organized by date, that now fills more than 1,200 volumes.<sup>58</sup>

*Erekson:* What do you think are the lessons learned from this period of Church record keeping?

*Snow:* During this time, we see the expansion of gathering records, from day-to-day business and ecclesiastical records to traditional historical documents to genealogical records. We also see the beginnings of efforts to help locate materials within the collection. And we developed a concern for compiling and reviewing records, whether they were local unit records, biographies, or manuscript histories.

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57. Committee members included Francis M. Lyman, Rudger Clawson, and Andrew Jenson. Rudger Clawson, *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson*, ed. Stan Larson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993): 123, 140; Anthon H. Lund, *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund, 1890–1921*, ed. John P. Hatch (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006): 108.

58. Staff compiled information from 1906 to 2008. See Gary Bergera, “‘The Commencement of Great Things’: The Origins, Scope, and Achievement of the Journal History of the Church,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 28; Andrew Jenson, *Eighty-Eighth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1917), 85–87. Narrative histories were prepared from these manuscript sources by Historian’s Office staff, though these were infrequently published. An example of one of these published histories is Andrew Jenson’s *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1927).

## The Modernization of Record Keeping

*Erekson:* In the middle of the twentieth century, things started to change.<sup>59</sup>

*Snow:* Elder Joseph Fielding Smith had become the Church Historian and Recorder in 1921 and filled the office for nearly fifty years, including while serving as President of the Quorum of the Twelve.<sup>60</sup> Even while serving as President of the Twelve, he would sign his letters as “General Church Recorder” when he was providing instruction or making inquiries about records.

For half of those years he also presided over the Genealogical Society of Utah (1934–61). The Church began to microfilm genealogical records in 1938, and a decade later Church leaders recognized that local-unit records contain vital records information, so they began to microfilm the records, forms, minute books, and histories of wards and branches in order to extract vital records information.

*Erekson:* How did his many roles affect the work of Church history?

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59. The changes mirrored changes in the wider profession. The archival profession had been born in 1909 at a meeting of the American Historical Association, and historians began to advocate for a national archive (established in 1934) and professional archival standards. Reflecting this national trend, the state of Utah appointed a state archivist in 1947. William Palmer had worked for the Church Historian’s Office and, influenced by the work of Church record keeping, he focused on microfilming state records and developing subject files on Utah communities. In 1954, the Utah State Historical Society began a program to organize state records, and Brigham Young University appointed an archivist in 1956. See David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America’s Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607–1884* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); David J. Russo, *Keepers of Our Past: Local Historical Writing in the United States, 1820s–1930s* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Randall C. Jimerson, “Documents and Archives in Early America,” *Archivaria* 60 (Fall 2005): 235–58; Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Cory L. Nimer and J. Gordon Daines III, “The Development and Professionalization of the Utah State Archives, 1897–1968,” *Journal of Western Archives* 3, no. 1 (2012): 16–17.

60. Joseph Fielding Smith served as an Apostle 1910–72 (including as President of the Church 1970–72) and was sustained the “Church Historian and General Church Recorder” on April 6, 1921; he was released on January 23, 1970, when he became President of the Church. *Ninety-First Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1921), 189; “New Church Historian Called,” *Church News*, February 14, 1970, 3.



*Snow*: Because of Joseph Fielding Smith's duties in the Twelve, direction of the day-to-day operations of the Historian's Office fell to assistants A. William Lund,<sup>61</sup> Preston Nibley,<sup>62</sup> and Earl Olson.<sup>63</sup>

*Erekson*: And in the 1950s and 1960s, those associates began to participate in professional archival and library circles.<sup>64</sup> But the most significant change toward professionalization originated under the direction of the First Presidency.

*Snow*: That's right. In 1965, the First Presidency established a centralized records management program to govern all Church records. The program included a standardized filing system and the use of common forms that were managed centrally. The Church developed a plan for record retention and appointed record officers in each department at headquarters.<sup>65</sup>

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61. A. William Lund (1886–1971) was sustained as Assistant Church Historian and Recorder on April 9, 1911, and died in office on February 8, 1971. "Authorities Sustained," *81st Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 132; Albert L. Zobell Jr., "In Memorium: A. William Lund (1886–1971)," *Ensign* 1 (March 1971): 75.

62. Preston Nibley (1884–1966) was sustained as Assistant Church Historian and Recorder on April 6, 1957, and released on October 31, 1963. *One Hundred Twenty-Seventh Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1957), 42; Historical Department office journal, 97:82 (November 21, 1963).

63. Earl E. Olson (1916–2010) was sustained as Assistant Church Historian and Recorder on October 1, 1965, and was assigned to be Church Archivist on January 14, 1972. *One Hundred Thirty-Fifth Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 25; Historical Department office journal, 101:13.

64. By 1965, staff in the office participated in the Society of American Archivists, the American Library Association, the Special Libraries Association, the National Microfilming Association, the American Records Management Association, and the Utah Library Association. Some of the librarians on the staff joined a committee sponsored by the Utah Library Association to develop a classification system to expand the Dewey system to allow for greater granularity in classifying publications about Latter-day Saints and their history. Paul A. Foulger, "Report of the Historian's Office Library-Archives for the Year 1960," 5, M258 H673r 1960, Church History Library; "Report of the Office of the Church Historian, Including the Historian's Office Library-Archives, for the Five-Year Period 1961–1965, and Inventory of Holdings as of December 31, 1965," 7, Church History Library.

65. First Presidency to all General Authorities, auxiliary executives, and heads of departments, February 17, 1965, copy in author's possession. Responsibility for forms and reports were transferred to the Presiding Bishopric in 1968.

*Erekson:* And the First Presidency assigned the Church Historian and Recorder to administer the program.

*Snow:* Yes. The following year, the Granite Mountain Records Vault was dedicated.<sup>66</sup> A report made at the end of 1970 indicated that during the first five years of the program, the Church had begun preserving business records onto microfilm, created record schedules to govern how long to keep records, and moved 5,200 boxes into a temporary records center. The gains in office floor space were estimated to have saved \$108,212 over the five-year period.<sup>67</sup>

*Erekson:* So current records began to be viewed as an asset, something to be managed effectively in order to improve the ongoing work of the Church. Two more centralizing influences also converged at this time.

*Snow:* First, Church leaders began to draw on information in the records more regularly. During the late 1960s, a central reference library was established to provide reference support to Church leaders and departments at headquarters and to coordinate and advise the activities of local meetinghouse libraries. This reference library was overseen by the Historian's Office.<sup>68</sup>

Second, the Historian's Office moved its records and its functions into the new Church Office Building in 1972. The reference library operated on the first floor of the east wing and the archive on the second. The new space offered larger storage space and improved work areas both for hosting visiting researchers and for staff projects.<sup>69</sup>

*Erekson:* The combination of new facilities and a more professional staff prompted significant internal changes. The archivists embraced the concept of maintaining record groups and collections that are based on provenance and original order. As a result, they began a decades-long initiative to dismantle the name-and-subject system in order to reconstitute the papers of Brigham Young and everyone else.

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66. See Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 236–41.

67. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian, Including the Historian's Office Library-Archives, for the Five Year Period 1966–1970, and an Inventory of Holdings as of December 31, 1970," 12–13, Church History Library.

68. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian . . . 1965," 5; "Report of the Office of the Church Historian . . . 1970," 8–9; "Library Program Moving Rapidly Ahead," *Church News*, January 23, 1971, 4; "The Church Moves On," *Improvement Era* 72, no. 3 (March 1969): 90.

69. "A Report of the Historical Department . . . 1971–1975," 8.

They also started to create registers of collections to help researchers locate specific items within the larger collection.

*Snow:* And all of this culminated in an important decision about the archive. There had been some debate about which of the Church's libraries and archives should serve as the Church's official archive. Beyond the libraries in meetinghouses, there were also collections of records at Church universities and schools. The Church established a Church Archives Coordinating Committee, which considered the question and then named the Historian's Office as the Church's official archive and central repository in 1973.<sup>70</sup>

*Erekson:* As you look back on the middle decades of the twentieth century, what are the most meaningful developments?

*Snow:* The establishment of the corporate records management program helped ensure that the Church would keep not just the historical documents but also the records created each day in the course of doing the work of salvation. The program also introduced the idea that not all records should be kept forever; some could be disposed of after their business use was completed. During this period, we see record keeping as a means of improving the effectiveness of the Church's day-to-day work.

We also see important strides in preservation through the construction of the Granite Mountain Records Vault and the expanded initiatives to create and preserve microfilm copies of records. And defining the Historian's Office as the official archive meant that all important institutional records should be preserved here.

Finally, we cannot underestimate the impact of the professional staff, who improved the ways that we describe and store our records. At the beginning of the period, turning to Church records to find genealogical information really was a new concept.

### **Years without a Church Recorder**

*Erekson:* We come now to a period in the history of Church record keeping about which much has been written, though in some ways the attention has been unevenly focused. A lot of commentary has been

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70. "An Archival Program for the Church Educational System," February 15, 1973, box 15, folder 3, University Archives, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; "Meeting of Archivists," minutes, July 16, 1973, box 77b, folder 3, University Archives.

given to Leonard Arrington's time as Church Historian in the 1970s and the Mark Hofmann forgeries and bombings of the early 1980s.<sup>71</sup> But let's talk about the work of record keeping during this time.

*Snow:* Elder Howard W. Hunter replaced President Smith as Church Historian and Recorder in 1970 and served for two years.<sup>72</sup> He had already been serving in the Quorum of the Twelve (since 1959) and as president of the Genealogical Society of Utah (since 1964). He devoted much of his time as Church Historian and Recorder to the filming of genealogical records and left the day-to-day operations of the Historical Department to Earl Olsen.

*Erekson:* The end of Elder Hunter's tenure marked a significant transition in the history of the office of Church Recorder.

*Snow:* Yes. Of most significance, the title of Church Recorder ceased to be used, and the title of Church Historian was assigned to a professionally trained employee. This change occurred at a time when various offices and auxiliaries were restructured along a common pattern, with a General Authority serving as the managing director of each department. The Church Historian's Office was renamed the Church Historical Department, and Apostle Alvin R. Dyer<sup>73</sup> was appointed as the managing director. Elder Dyer carried all of the responsibilities previously assigned to Elder Hunter. However, the title of Church Historian (without Church Recorder) was assigned to the head of the

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71. Gregory A. Prince, *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016); Richard E. Turley Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

72. Howard W. Hunter (1907–95) served as an Apostle 1959–95 and was announced as the Church Historian and Recorder on February 14, 1970; sustained on April 6, 1970; and released on January 14, 1972. "New Church Historian Called," *Church News*, February 14, 1970, 3, 13; "Voting on Prophets, Seers, and Revelators," *One Hundred Fortieth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1970), 110; Historical Department office journal, 101:13; Leonard J. Arrington, "The Founding of the LDS Church Historical Department, 1972," *Journal of Mormon History* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 45–46.

73. Alvin R. Dyer (1903–77) served as an Apostle 1967–77, including time as a counselor in the First Presidency (1968–70) and as an Assistant to the Twelve (1970–76). On the restructuring, see Alvin R. Dyer, "The Future of Church History," *Ensign* 2 (August 1972): 58–61.

newly organized History Division, Leonard Arrington.<sup>74</sup> At the same time, Arrington's fellow division heads, Earl E. Olson and Donald T. Schmidt, were assigned the respective titles of Church Archivist and Church Librarian. In 1975, Florence S. Jacobsen became Church Curator, but no one was named as Church Recorder.

*Erekson:* During this time without a Church Recorder, what happened to the record-keeping functions?

*Snow:* Earl Olson had been appointed as a records manager when the records management program was organized in 1965. So he and Schmidt dealt with records management issues during the mid-1970s. Then the responsibility for managing records began to move around the Church, first to the Management Data Department (in 1977) and then to Finance and Records (in 1987). The Historical Department stopped collecting the minutes of local Church units in 1978 and began collecting instead an annual historical report.

*Erekson:* Was that the end of the title of Church Recorder?

*Snow:* Elder G. Homer Durham<sup>75</sup> of the Seventy became the department's managing director in 1977, and in 1982 he received the title

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74. Leonard J. Arrington (1917–99) was announced as Church Historian on January 14, 1972, and sustained on April 6, 1972. His title was changed to "Director of the History Division" on February 24, 1978; the division was transferred to BYU in the summer of 1980; and he was formally released in February 1982. Historical Department office journal, 98:58, 101:13; "General Authorities and Officers of the Church," *One Hundred Forty-Second Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972), 9. He was possibly released on February 2 since that is when Elder Durham was set apart (see note 75). Lavina Fielding Anderson, "A Note on Church Historians," *By Common Consent* 11, no. 3 (July 2005): 4, <http://mormon-alliance.org/newsletter/2005jul.htm>; Gary Topping, *Leonard J. Arrington: A Historian's Life* (Norman, Okla.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008): 99–101; Gary James Bergera, ed., *Confessions of a Mormon Historian: The Diaries of Leonard J. Arrington, 1971–1999*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2018), 1:103–4, 122; 2:475–77; 3:74, 77–108. For a complete list of works published by the History Division, see Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Doves and Serpents: The Activities of Leonard Arrington as Church Historian, 1972–1982* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1982): 244 (Appendix B numbered separately, 1–41).

75. G. Homer Durham (1911–85) served as a member of the Seventy 1977–85. He was set apart at Church Historian and Recorder on February 2, 1982, and was not sustained in general conference. He died in office on January 10, 1985. Historical Department office journal, 99:85; "Elder G. Homer Durham Dies," *Ensign* 15 (March 1985): 74–75. Though Durham was not sustained, Gordon B.

of Church Historian and Recorder.<sup>76</sup> His successor, Elder Dean L. Larsen, likewise carried the dual title while leading the department from 1985 to 1989.<sup>77</sup> But from that point until 2005, neither a Church Historian nor a Church Recorder was called. The offices remained vacant until Elder Marlin K. Jensen's appointment in 2005. Despite these changes in title and role, the top-level responsibility for leading the Church History Department was continuously assigned to a member of the Seventy who at first held the title of managing director and then the title of executive director after 1985.<sup>78</sup>

*Erekson:* So the role of Church Recorder was officially vacant for less than a decade, but in practice, it was vacant off and on for approximately thirty years.

*Snow:* Yes, and in that time, we lost a central officer to certify the important records of the Church, as had been outlined in section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

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Hinckley announced Durham's appointment during general conference on April 4, 1982. *Official Report of the One Hundred Fifty-Second Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 96.

76. Elder Joseph Anderson (1889–1992) served as managing director 1975–77. He had previously served as secretary to the First Presidency (1922–70) and as an assistant to the Twelve (1970–76). He later served as a member of the Seventy (1976–78).

77. Dean L. Larsen (1927–) served as a member of the Seventy 1976–97, including time as a President of the Seventy (1980–93). He was announced as Church Historian and Recorder on February 28, 1985; sustained on April 6, 1985; and transferred to the Temple Department on October 2, 1989. Though he did not actually act in the role of Church Historian and Recorder, he was formally released from that calling at the time of his transition to emeritus status on October 4, 1997. Historical Department office journal, 99:100; Gordon B. Hinkley, "The Sustaining of Church Officers," *Ensign* 15 (May 1985): 5; Historical Department office journal, 99:140; James E. Faust, "The Sustaining of Church Officers," *Ensign* 27 (November 1997): 20. During Elder Larsen's tenure, the title of the General Authority leader of Church departments was changed to "Executive Director," and the title "Managing Director" was assigned to the highest-ranking employee in the department.

78. Responsibility for leading the department during this period was assigned to members of the Seventy: Joseph Anderson (1975–77), G. Homer Durham (1977–85), Dean L. Larsen (1985–89), John K. Carmack (1989–91), Loren C. Dunn (1991–93), Stephen D. Nadauld (1993–96), Marlin K. Jensen (1996–98), John K. Carmack (1998–99), Loren C. Dunn (1999–2000), D. Todd Christofferson (2000–2004), and Marlin K. Jensen (2004–5).

## Into the Twenty-First Century

*Erekson:* Even though no one held the office of Church Recorder, records continued to be created in the Church. What happened as the Church moved into the twenty-first century?

*Snow:* As Church wards and stakes were organized around the world, records began to be created in many languages and many formats—paper, audio, digital. The Temple Department experimented with electronic records throughout the 1980s and went entirely digital in 1990.<sup>79</sup> Membership records also went digital in the 1980s. In the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, new electronic systems were created to record information about financial contributions, unit boundaries, and local and general leaders. And the Church also mounted its first website, lds.org, in 1996, which introduced an ever-growing practice of digital publishing.

*Erekson:* Concerns about managing electronic records soon arose. How were the concerns addressed?

*Snow:* Sometime in the early 1990s, the responsibility for managing records came back to the Church History Department. Around the turn of the century, the First Presidency established an Electronic Records Management Committee, which concluded that more attention to records was needed. As a result, they appointed Elder Jensen<sup>80</sup> as the Church Historian and Recorder in 2005.

*Erekson:* How did Elder Jensen tackle the work of the Church Recorder?

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79. The Temple Department was created in 1979. Temple records were kept on paper in temples until the 1980s. In 1981, the Salt Lake City Temple piloted an automated Temple Recording System (TRS), and the Church implemented the system in the Jordan River Temple. The Provo, Ogden, and Swiss Temples were retrofitted in 1982, and by 1986 the system operated in eighteen more temples. In 1989, the department stopped recording information about proxies, witnesses, and officiators, keeping only the recipient information in a new and simpler Ordinance Recording System (ORS), piloted in the Logan Temple in 1990 and installed in most other temples the following year. See Allen, Embry, and Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 310–11.

80. Elder Marlin K. Jensen (1942–) served as a member of the Seventy 1989–2012, including time in the Presidency of the Seventy (1998–2001). He was sustained as Church Historian and Recorder on April 2, 2005, and released on October 6, 2012. “The Sustaining of Church Officers,” *Ensign* 35 (May 2005): 23; Eyring, “Sustaining of Church Officers,” *Ensign* 42 (November 2012): 25.

*Snow:* First, he established and chaired a new Churchwide Records Management Committee. Through this committee, he guided the creation of “policies, processes, and systems that will help manage and preserve essential Church records.”<sup>81</sup> The committee also refreshed the Church’s records management program, helping each department appoint a records coordinator from among its own employees.

*Erekson:* And those department employees were, in turn, supported by professionals in the Church History Department.

*Snow:* That’s right. And the professional staff in the Church History Department help in a number of ways. They create a comprehensive schedule of record retention and disposition to guide how long the Church should keep current business records. Our employees can also help make plans to preserve digital records long-term. During Elder Jensen’s tenure, the Church began to use electronic systems to manage current records and to preserve electronic records of enduring historical value.<sup>82</sup>

I should also add that during his tenure, the Church History Library building was completed. It was dedicated in 2009 by President Thomas S. Monson as the place appointed for the Church’s “countless records” to be “carefully preserved for future generations.”<sup>83</sup>

*Erekson:* Looking back on this long history of record keeping, what are the lessons or precedents that you see for the office of Church Recorder?

*Snow:* It appears clear to me that the office of Church Recorder is important to the work of the whole Church, and there are benefits in linking the office with that of Church Historian. It is also clear that the Church Recorder cannot create every record but instead must serve as a central collector who can certify that the records were properly

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81. Jensen and Boone, “Historian by Yearning,” 5.

82. The first electronic system used by the Church for current records was Vignette Records and Documents (VRD), and the Church has since migrated to an IBM-based platform called FileNet that allows the use of automated rules about which records to keep and which are no longer needed. The Church began this process of automated record disposition in 2014. The department began to host a Digital Records Preservation System (DRPS) in 2011 that runs continuous quality checks to protect against file corruption and can reconstitute information in any format in the future.

83. Thomas S. Monson, “Church History Library Dedicatory Prayer,” June 20, 2009, 3, CR 626 3, Church History Library.



created and appropriately preserved. It also seems that what types of records are preserved is not as important as the practices of record keeping. Records can be created with paper, microfilm, or electronic formats; regardless of the format, the right practices need to be followed. Finally, and this is why I think the recorder function is linked to the historian function, the records need to be organized in such a way that they can be accessed to serve the work of the Church. Sometimes that service is provided by publishing the records; at other times it is provided by study and consultation, and sometimes it is provided by awarding access to the record creators so that they can manage their work more effectively. In all of these uses, we fulfill a solemn duty to keep records and remember the work of the Lord.

### **Defining the Work of the Church Recorder Today**

*Erekson:* That brief history brings us back, full circle, to your time in the office.

*Snow:* After I was sustained in general conference, my ten-year-old granddaughter called with a question. She asked me, “What does the Church Historian and Recorder do? Do you keep a scrapbook for the Church or what?” The idea of a scrapbook is helpful because we really do bring together all kinds of records. But the work is much larger and much more complicated.

*Erekson:* That fuller understanding of the history of the office of Church Recorder became the first step in defining the work of the Recorder today. How did that process unfold?

*Snow:* We started with a summary of the historical findings and began to discuss them with the members of the Records Management Committee, which I now chaired. We also talked with the Presiding Bishopric, who oversees the Church departments responsible for financial, membership, and statistical records. In the process of creating the Digital Records Preservation System, a second Churchwide committee had been created to evaluate options for that system and to help effectively store electronic records. We took up the questions with the members of those committees and also discussed our findings with two members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who serve as advisers to the Church History Department. As a result of counseling together, we created a proposal to take to the First Presidency in September 2016.

*Erekson:* The proposal was approved, and you came away from that meeting authorized to make some important changes. Let's start with the organizational side.

*Snow:* We began by merging two committees. The Records Management Committee had cared for paper records, and the Digital Records Preservation Committee had studied digital records. The new committee, chaired by the Church Historian and Recorder, is called the Church Record-Keeping Executive Committee, and it contains staff members representing the leading quorums, as well as leaders of departments that create important records, such as the Temple and Family History Departments, and the leaders of departments that support the creation of records, such as the Publishing Services and Information and Communication Services Departments. This executive committee is supported by a standing operations committee with directors from the same key departments as well as working groups that form to address various long- and short-term needs.

*Erekson:* You also initiated new procedures for tracking and reporting progress.

*Snow:* We began an annual process of reporting to Church departments on the status of their record preservation. Our Records Management team conducted a manual inventory of records in 2015 to establish a baseline. Since that time, we've begun to develop electronic tools to monitor and report. Each year we produce a records report for each department or entity of the Church. This is the modern fulfillment of the instruction given to the Church Recorder in Doctrine and Covenants 128:4: He receives the records, enters them into the general Church collection, and certifies that the records are true and preserved.

*Erekson:* And you also became more active in teaching the principles of record keeping.

*Snow:* This recognizes that records are created all over the world and only come to the Church Recorder for certification. So we defined principles and guidelines for training the record keepers. Internally, the most visible way we do this is through an annual Record Keeping Summit, held in the first months of each year since 2017. At the meeting, we review accomplishments, make assignments, distribute the annual reports, and provide instruction on record-keeping principles and practices.

*Erekson:* And there are several other ways that this instruction is delivered. We've created orientation and personal development training for departmental records coordinators as well as training materials that coordinators deliver to their respective departments. Beginning in 2018, new employees learn about the importance of record keeping during their human resources orientation. And an internal website provides Church employees with guidelines, definitions, and helpful video instruction.

*Snow:* I also shared the history and lessons of record keeping at a recent gathering of temple recorders. And I've shared the principles with my brethren in the Seventy on various occasions.

*Erekson:* How about for Church members?

*Snow:* I shared a summary of the principles together with scriptural thoughts about record keeping in the electronic edition of the April 2019 *Ensign*.<sup>84</sup>

*Erekson:* Let's talk a little bit about the principles of record keeping. Where did the "Pattern for Record Keeping" (fig. 1) originate?

*Snow:* In addition to studying the history of the office, we also searched the scriptures for principles we could use in teaching. And, our records management and preservation professionals brought their expertise in both fields to align scriptural principles with the best practices in industry.

*Erekson:* The result is a statement of nine principles (fig. 1).

*Snow:* We can *organize* ourselves by appointing people to be responsible for the records,<sup>85</sup> selecting which records to keep<sup>86</sup> and making plans

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84. Steven E. Snow, "The Sacred Duty of Record Keeping," *Ensign* 49 (April 2019), <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2019/04/the-sacred-duty-of-record-keeping>.

85. Best practices for stewardship include to (1) understand the importance of record keeping and the role of the Church Recorder; (2) recognize that Church records refer to all information, in any form, created for the transaction of Church business and ecclesiastical activities; (3) assign responsibility for managing records to appropriate stewards; and (4) learn the duties related to record-keeping stewardship. Relevant scriptures include Doctrine and Covenants 78:11; 85:1-2; 104:11; 107:99; and 128:4.

86. Best practices for selection include to (1) identify the records created and received during the normal course of activity; (2) group like records together into record sets and identify various record formats; (3) determine how long to



# A Pattern for Record Keeping

“Behold, there shall be a record kept among you.”

—Doctrine and Covenants 21:1

## Organize



### Stewardship

“Wherefore, now let every man learn his duty.”

—D&C 107:99



### Selection

“They are choice unto me; and I know they will be choice unto my brethren.”

—Words of Mormon 1:6



### Planning

“By small and simple things are great things brought to pass.” —Alma 37:6

## Manage



### Protection

“These things were to be kept sacred ... from one generation to another.” —Alma 63:13



### Retention

“Keep a record of this people ... for it is for a wise purpose that they are kept.”

—Alma 37:2



### Disposition

“It has hitherto been wisdom in God that these things should be preserved.” —Alma 37:8

## Preserve



### Storage

“Let all the records be had in order, that they may be put in the archives.” —D&C 127:9



### Access

“Put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired.”

—Joseph Smith—History 1:1



### Certification

“Certifying in his record that he saw with his eyes, and heard with his ears.” —D&C 128:3

FIGURE 1. A Pattern for Record Keeping. Courtesy Church History Library. © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

to care for the records.<sup>87</sup> Then we *manage* our records by protecting them from loss or destruction,<sup>88</sup> retaining them as long as necessary,<sup>89</sup> and making a proper decision on whether or not to preserve them long-term.<sup>90</sup> We *preserve* the records by storing them properly,<sup>91</sup> making appropriate provisions to access them,<sup>92</sup> and certifying that they are properly kept.<sup>93</sup>

*Erekson:* That is the message of record keeping. It gives us much to expound on throughout the coming years as we work with Church departments, affiliated Church entities, and area offices around the world.

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keep each record set; and (4) decide what to do with each record set after it is no longer needed. Relevant scriptures include Doctrine and Covenants 57:13; 69:8; and Words of Mormon 1:5–6.

87. Best practices for planning include to (1) create and document policies and procedures; (2) implement systems for managing records; and (3) enable auditing and verification of effective record keeping. Relevant scriptures include Mosiah 4:27; Alma 37:6–7; and Doctrine and Covenants 88:119.

88. Best practices for protection include to (1) ensure the integrity of records: that they are accurate, authentic, reliable, and properly cared for; (2) secure access to information that is confidential, private, or sacred; and (3) make records available only to those who need appropriate access. Relevant scriptures include 1 Nephi 14:30; Alma 37:2; and 63:13.

89. Best practices for retention include to (1) retain records in compliance with Church policy and all applicable laws and regulations; (2) find and retrieve needed records efficiently; and (3) facilitate appropriate discovery, regulatory compliance, and Church audit. Relevant scriptures include 2 Nephi 3:12; Joseph Smith—History 1:1; and Articles of Faith 1:12.

90. Best practices for disposition include to (1) transfer records of enduring historical value to the Church History Library; and (2) destroy records with expired utility and no enduring value. Relevant scriptures include Doctrine and Covenants 47:3; 69:5–6; and Jacob 3:13.

91. Best practices for storage include to (1) preserve records of enduring value in dedicated preservation facilities and systems; (2) maintain proper environmental and geographic conditions for long-term preservation; and (3) provide appropriate physical and intellectual controls of records. Relevant scriptures include 1 Nephi 19:3; Jacob 4:2; Alma 37:14; and Doctrine and Covenants 127:9.

92. Best practices for access include to (1) make records accessible today and in the future for appropriate uses; and (2) safeguard accessible records against loss, theft, and error. Relevant scriptures include 1 Nephi 19:5; 2 Nephi 27:22; and Alma 37:8.

93. Best practices for certification include to (1) track, verify, and report the status of record collection and preservation; (2) monitor and migrate records while continuously validating record integrity; and (3) certify that records have been kept properly. Relevant scriptures include Doctrine and Covenants 128:3–4; Alma 37:5; and 3 Nephi 23:7.

*Snow:* And it is comforting to know that behind the principles, we have the support of dedicated professionals employed by the Church History Department who stay on top of the latest issues and technological developments in the fields of digital preservation, records management, and information governance.

*Erekson:* Do you have any final insights or observations to share?

*Snow:* This effort to define the role of Church Recorder has been one of the most important developments of my tenure. Researching and counseling together brought clarity to questions that had existed for more than forty years. This understanding should benefit the work of the office of Church Historian and Recorder for decades to come. I am grateful for the scholars in our department who have worked so hard to clarify these issues.

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Elder Steven E. Snow was sustained as a General Authority Seventy of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on March 31, 2001, and will be made emeritus at the October 2019 general conference. He served as a member of the Presidency of the Seventy from 2007 to 2012 and as Church Historian and Recorder from 2012 to 2019. A native of St. George, Utah, he attended Dixie College and earned his bachelor's degree in accounting at Utah State University and his law degree at Brigham Young University. Prior to his call as a full-time General Authority of the Church, he was a senior partner in the Utah law firm of Snow Nuffer.