



4-1-2021

Manuscripts, Murder, and a Miniseries: A Personal Essay

Richard E. Turley Jr.

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



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

Recommended Citation

Turley Jr., Richard E. (2021) "Manuscripts, Murder, and a Miniseries: A Personal Essay," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 60 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol60/iss2/13>

This Essay is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Manuscripts, Murder, and a Miniseries

A Personal Essay

Richard E. Turley Jr.

On March 3, 2021, a three-part miniseries on the Mark Hofmann forgery-murder case of the 1980s premiered on Netflix, a popular subscription-based streaming service. The three-part miniseries, titled *Murder among the Mormons*, quickly catapulted into the top echelon of most-watched Netflix programs in the United States.¹ Because I appeared in the miniseries, many people began asking me questions about this criminal case I have followed since it first attracted widespread public attention.

In many ways, Mark William Hofmann's early life paralleled mine, though with vastly different results. We were born fourteen months apart, putting him a year ahead of me in school. During high school, we lived within walking distance of each other's homes in Salt Lake City. I graduated from Skyline High School, and he graduated from Olympus, schools that are sports rivals but that also draw from adjacent neighborhoods students who are friends.

I often mixed with Olympus students academically, socially, and religiously but do not recall ever meeting Mark. I interacted with Olympus students during interscholastic academic activities, dances, and seminary programs, usually in a spirit of friendship instead of the animosity some people expected from sports rivals. After high school, Mark went on a mission to England, and I on a mission to Japan.

1. Taylor Horn, "Interview: Utah Historian Featured in Netflix's Docu-series 'Murder among the Mormons,'" ABC4.com, *Good Morning Utah*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.abc4.com/gmu/interview-utah-historian-featured-in-netflixs-docu-series-murder-among-the-mormons/>.

I later had an opportunity to interview Mark's mission president and others who served in his mission with him. In addition, I read accounts of people who knew him during his missionary service. On the surface, his mission president told me, Elder Hofmann seemed like a typical missionary in his day. Other missionaries who did not live in the same apartment with him said essentially the same thing.

Those who lived with him twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, portrayed him in widely different ways. On the one hand, he displayed behavior that suggested he was ultraconservative in his religious views and diligent in his missionary labors. On the other hand, he liked to frequent old book shops and purchase literature that was critical of the Church, keeping his cache of negative materials in a box under his bed, a symbol of the closet atheism he adopted in his mid-teens but sought to hide under a pious façade.

The two faces of the superficially devout Hofmann and the secretly nihilistic one began forming years earlier when he developed doubts and questions for which he found no suitable outlet or answers. He nurtured his doubts to the point of cynicism and elected to live a life of deception. On the surface, he pretended to be an active Latter-day Saint, a returned missionary who married in the temple. Secretly, he believed humans were destined to die and had no future beyond this life. If he succeeded in deceiving them or shortened their life spans, then in his mind there was no harm done.

He coldly deceived and used his innocent wife, Doralee Olds, in the "discovery" of his first highly publicized forgery, that of the Anthon transcript, which he offered to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As with subsequent forgeries acquired by institutions, this one was studied by historians and subjected to background research to confirm Hofmann's account of the document's provenance. After six months of study turned up nothing to discount the document's authenticity or Hofmann's story of its genealogy, a librarian purchased the document to add it to the Church's collections.²

Hofmann's second major "find," the Joseph Smith III Blessing, ended up with the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, known today as the Community of Christ. The RLDS Church submitted the document to highly skilled professional document examiners and submitted a physical sample from the document to a top scientific

2. Richard E. Turley Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 24-39.

laboratory for testing. None of the experts found anything to suggest the document was anything other than what Hofmann represented it to be.³

My wife, Shirley, and I were living in Japan when the Anthon Transcript and Joseph Smith III Blessing hit the news. We returned to Utah in 1981, and having a deep interest in Latter-day Saint history, I heard a lot about Hofmann and his documents, including his most famous forgery, the so-called Salamander Letter. The letter, purportedly written by Book of Mormon witness Martin Harris, portrayed one of the key events of the Restoration in folk magic terms.⁴

Some people found the letter quite disturbing, leaving the Church or ceasing activity in it because of the document. One man—the brother of one of my later neighbors—committed suicide as the result of a mental slide the letter precipitated. I marveled at these dramatic life decisions made on the basis of one document or at most a few. The Salamander Letter didn't bother me because it struck me as an anomaly. I couldn't explain it immediately but was sure time would answer the questions it raised. I looked at Church history as a giant jigsaw puzzle, and I didn't see one piece of the puzzle or even a few as changing the overall picture very much.

Even though I knew that the Salamander Letter, like Hofmann's other documents, had been subjected to forensic analysis, I also knew such analysis could never really prove any object to be authentic. At most, it could only identify problems that might prove the object to be fake. But the failure to discover such problems didn't make the document authentic.

President Gordon B. Hinckley's comment on the document seemed a reasonable one to me. "No one, of course, can be certain that Martin Harris wrote the document," he said in a public statement at the time of the document's release. "However, at this point we accept the judgment of the examiner that there is no indication that it is a forgery. This does not preclude the possibility that it may have been forged at a time when the Church had many enemies."⁵

In a course I took at Brigham Young University on the early history of the Church in the British Isles, I learned how the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in Preston, England, had seen a banner emblazoned

3. Turley, *Victims*, 40-53.

4. Turley, *Victims*, 79-82.

5. Turley, *Victims*, 100.

with the words “Truth shall prevail.” The slogan lifted their spirits, and they responded with hearty amens and “Thanks be to God, truth will prevail!”⁶ Time, I knew, was the great tester, and truth would prevail.

Time tested the Salamander Letter and ultimately proved it a forgery.

Hofmann set his bombs to buy time for his increasingly complex forgery scheme to work out. Instead, the bombs accelerated the trap that was closing in around him. The bombs concentrated forensic resources on his documents at a level not previously reached. From Hofmann’s first highly advertised “discovery,” the Anthon transcript, people had doubts about his documents. But efforts to prove them fake failed.

Until the bombings.

With three explosions and two murders to solve, detectives and forensic document examiners went further than ever before in looking at the possibility the documents were not real. The bombings focused investigative resources and took advantage of tools like subpoenas and court orders. Without such extraordinary focus, it might have been years, even decades, before Hofmann’s forgery scheme completely fell apart.

Like virtually everyone in Utah in October 1985, I became aware of the bombings as they happened. The murderous explosions and ensuing investigation topped the news that month and in ensuing weeks and months. It seemed the whole state was on edge, or at least those like me who lived and worked in the Salt Lake Valley. The possible tie between the bombings and Church history put history on the lips of everyone with more than a superficial interest in the topic.

Under these conditions, I found it strange when a call came through on my law office phone line and the caller introduced himself, said he was representing an undisclosed principal, and asked if he could question me about Church history. Normally, I was too busy to deal with solicitors and might have turned him down. But something about the call intrigued me, and I agreed to answer the man’s questions.

“What is the likelihood that on a free Saturday afternoon you would be studying Church history?” he asked. Other questions similarly centered on me and my background, not Church history per se. I hung up the phone at the end of the conversation thinking it was one of the most unusual calls I had ever received.

6. The story is conveniently accessible in *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), chap. 24.

I didn't begin to understand the call's purpose until the following Monday, December 30, 1985, when I received another telephone call, this one from Elder Dallin H. Oaks, who had been called to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles almost twenty-one months earlier. He had been a role model for me over the years, and I felt honored when he invited me to lunch that day and probed my knowledge of Church history.⁷

I had begun a deep study of Church history in 1971 when I was fifteen years old, and he asked me to name books I had read recently and journals I studied to keep me up to date on the subject. He also asked questions about my family and my personal life. He was gregarious, warm, and witty, and I felt comfortable around him.

He called me again on Friday, January 3, 1986, and by the end of the day I had met with two more General Authorities, Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve and Elder Dean L. Larsen of the Presidency of the Seventy. The latter, who also served as Church Historian and Recorder, stunned me by asking me to become the managing director of the Church Historical Department.⁸ I was an august twenty-nine years of age at the time.

I started my new job seventeen days later and found myself in the Church Historical Department at one of the toughest times in its history. The potential tie of the Hofmann bombings to historical documents made the department a veritable crime scene. All it lacked was yellow police tape. The staff was cooperating with investigators, who had requested copies of all the documents the Church had acquired from Hofmann and documents that were unquestionably authentic to compare with them.⁹

7. Richard E. Turley Jr., *In the Hands of the Lord: The Life of Dallin H. Oaks* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2021), 198-99; Richard E. Turley Jr., "How I Came to Write *In the Hands of the Lord: The Life of Dallin H. Oaks*," March 4, 2021, <https://www.ldsliving.com/Richard-E-Turley-Jr-How-I-came-to-write-In-the-Hands-of-the-Lord-The-Life-of-Dallin-H-Oaks/s/93993>.

8. Actually, he asked me to be the assistant managing director, a title used at the time that really made no sense since there was no managing director. The assistant managing director title was the vestige of an earlier Church titling system in which the General Authority department heads were called managing directors and the staff heads were called assistant managing directors. Sometime before I was asked to serve as staff head, the General Authority title had been changed to executive director. Eventually, my title, like those of all other staff heads of departments with General Authority leaders in the Church, was changed to managing director without a change in responsibilities.

9. Turley, *Victims*, 236-37.

The bombings had created fear in the Church history community and taken a toll on staff morale. At the time, some of the staff defended Hofmann vigorously to their colleagues, saying he couldn't possibly be a bomber and a murderer. And yet what investigators were quietly telling us about their investigation seemed to point to him as the chief suspect.

On February 4, 1986, Salt Lake City police informed the head of Church security that Hofmann had been arrested and charged with twenty-nine criminal counts that included capital murder, bombing, and theft by deception.¹⁰ The charges only increased the volume in the argument between Hofmann's detractors and defenders in the historical community. The preliminary hearing that followed these charges walked the public through the evidence uncovered by investigators and created high drama, culminating in Hofmann's pleading guilty in January 1987. The sentencing judge recommended to the board of pardons that the murderous forger spend the rest of his life in prison.¹¹

During the period between Hofmann's bombs in 1985 and the year 1988, I watched as books, journal articles, newspaper stories, and broadcast media features recounted the story of Mark Hofmann and his impact on the Church. Though I had never met Hofmann and did not work for the Church at the time he was polluting its historical collections with his forgeries, I knew there was an inside story of the case that had never been told.

As a staff member at Church headquarters, I often found myself in offices of senior Church leaders who wanted to discuss history and current events. One day, as I was sitting in the office of Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, we were discussing the Hofmann case, and I proposed writing a book about it. He seemed amenable to the idea, and a short time later, I found myself in another high-level conversation. This one was initiated by Elders Boyd K. Packer and David B. Haight of the Twelve, and they also expressed their feelings that a book should be written on the topic. At the time, I assumed they were responding to what I had said to Elder Maxwell. Later, I learned they came up with the idea independently.

With help from staff (especially Glenn N. Rowe, one of the senior employees in the Church Historical Department) and full cooperation from Church leaders, who opened their personal and work records to

10. Turley, *Victims*, 240.

11. Turley, *Victims*, 240-313.

me, I worked four grueling years to finish the book *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case*, which was published by the University of Illinois Press in 1992 and became a regional best-seller. While I was writing the book, Hofmann sent me identical messages through two different sources expressing a willingness to assist me with the work. To both messages, I gave the same response: Please put your offer in writing. I knew Hofmann was a pathological liar who liked to manipulate people, and I wanted to document fully whatever he told me. He never responded.

I also asked his attorney, Ron Yengich, for permission to interview his client, but he would not let me. That disappointed me, but I would probably have responded similarly had I been in his shoes as a defense attorney. Hofmann's only chance to get out of prison would be for the parole board to consider his case sometime in the future, and Yengich may not have wanted his client to incriminate himself further.

Although other books had been published on the topic before *Victims*, my book did two things others did not. First, it followed a diachronic approach. As readers worked their way through the narrative, the book provided them in each chapter with only the facts people had at the time. This way of unfolding the whole story made a huge difference in historical interpretation because hindsight skews our understanding of the past, making it difficult to put ourselves in the mindset of characters we are studying.

Other books on the case began with the Hofmann bombings, which made readers suspicious from the beginning of those books and gave them a point of view lacking at the time key events occurred. Such a viewpoint can make people wrongly conclude that if they had been present on the scene at the time, they would immediately have detected Hofmann's documents as forgeries and would not have been deceived. Though this is a psychologically comforting perception, research suggests it does not reflect reality.

In writing about another famous Utah crime, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, I delved deeply into the history of violence and learned how much people rely on the false notion that they can detect criminals and their schemes ahead of time.¹² News stories sometimes feature mug

12. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows: An American Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Richard E. Turley Jr. and Ronald W. Walker, eds., *Mountain Meadows Massacre: The*

shots of recently arrested criminals who have tussled with police, been on drugs, or done other things that leave them with mussed-up hair, crazed looks, bruises, or other signs people may associate with criminals. But the reality is that many successful criminals appear perfectly normal, even nondescript. Ted Bundy succeeded in perpetrating rape and murder because he was an educated, good-looking man who differed from the television stereotype of a serial sex offender. Mark Hofmann succeeded by projecting the aura of a nerdy, even goofy, guy who didn't know a lot about history but chased down leads well and enjoyed a bit of luck.

In the wake of the recent miniseries, I have been amused at how often people with twenty-twenty hindsight imply they would not have been deceived by Hofmann's exploits had they lived at the time. What made Hofmann successful was not just skilled forgeries. Rather, it was his clever façade of being a bumbling nerd. Some of his forgeries were world-class, others rather amateurish, and from time to time, historians and others pointed out anachronisms or other problems with documents he tried to peddle. Hofmann responded by acting stupid, thanking the person who pointed out the problem, and saying he would have to go back to his seller and get his money back.

He deceived experts by not appearing to be an expert himself.

A second difference between *Victims* and other books on the case was its inclusion of endnotes to guide readers to the sources of the story. The idea that journalists create the first rough draft of history goes back many decades.¹³ By creating the first draft, journalists do their readers and history generally a great service. But history-writing must not end there. Journalists sometimes repeat rumor and speculation that, unchallenged, harden into supposed facts. It is up to historians to sift true news from fake, fact from fiction, truth from error, rumor from reality.

Andrew Jenson and David H. Morris Collections (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009); Richard E. Turley Jr., Janiece L. Johnson, and LaJean Purcell Carruth, *Mountain Meadows Massacre Collected Legal Papers*, vol. 1, *Initial Investigations and Indictments* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017); Richard E. Turley Jr., Janiece L. Johnson, and LaJean Purcell Carruth, *Mountain Meadows Massacre Collected Legal Papers*, vol. 2, *Selected Trial Records and Aftermath* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

13. Jack Shafer, "Who Said It First? Journalism Is the 'First Rough Draft of History,'" *Slate*, August 30, 2010, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2010/08/on-the-trail-of-the-question-who-first-said-or-wrote-that-journalism-is-the-first-rough-draft-of-history.html>.

Though the mere appearance of footnotes and endnotes in a work scares away some readers, it attracts others and in the long run provides the key to sorting solid evidence from speculative interpretation.

Because I wrote a book on the Mark Hofmann case, I have been interviewed many times over the last three and a half decades for television programs that feature his crimes. Some of these have been news programs. Others have been true-crime productions, a highly popular genre for today's television viewers. These programs have varied in quality. The worst have been breathless B-grade dramas that take an already fascinating case and soup it up with needless and even misleading fictional elements. One of the best programs in which I participated was a serious documentary produced by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Having been a frequent interview subject for programs about the Hofmann case and other historical subjects, I was not surprised when I was approached by Jared Hess, Tyler Measom, and one of their colleagues on March 16, 2018, about their desire to create a miniseries on the Mark Hofmann case. We chatted for some time, and I agreed to assist them. In harmony with my long-time operating principle of being transparent to those with whom I worked, I let our staff and senior Church leaders know about the request and my desire to cooperate.

Jared Hess, who is well known in Latter-day Saint circles for his comedy films *Napoleon Dynamite* and *Nacho Libre*, is a cousin of mine. His great-grandfather Lawrence Edward Turley is a half-brother of my grandfather Edward Vernon Turley. The brothers were born to different wives of our polygamous ancestor Edward Franklin Turley in Colonia Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. I did not recall meeting Jared before he came to my office in 2018, but I knew Lawrence quite well, and he had even given me some family treasures when I showed interest in our Turley family organization while I was in my twenties.

Tyler Measom is likewise an experienced filmmaker, with titles like *An Honest Liar* and *Sons of Perdition* to his credit. When he, Jared, and their colleague approached me in my office, I was pleased that experienced filmmakers with an understanding of Latter-day Saint culture had decided to take on the complicated story of Mark Hofmann and his crimes. To understand the Hofmann case clearly requires comprehending details that could only be presented in a multipart film of the type they intended to produce.

Between that first meeting and the debut of the miniseries on March 3, 2021, my three visitors and I communicated many times, especially Jared and I. We hit it off well, and I could tell they were asking the right kinds of questions and speaking to as many key figures in the case as they reasonably could. As one with an obsession for digging deeply into original historical sources, I resonated with their approach of seeking genuine news footage from the 1980s about the Hofmann case.

When it came time for filming, I was happy to show up at the Masonic temple on South Temple in Salt Lake City, the filmmakers' chosen venue for doing many of the interviews for the miniseries. The Masonic temple offered large spaces that could be rented inexpensively and would provide interesting backgrounds for interviews. Having done many similar interviews in the past, I realized that the half day I dedicated to being interviewed might dissolve into a single sound bite in the final product. Such is the nature of filmmaking: weeks of filming have to condense into a size digestible by the viewing audience.

Originally, Jared and Tyler wanted to create a six-part miniseries that would explore some of the arcane details of the fascinating case for the BBC America audience to which they initially aimed it. When Netflix acquired the rights to their work, however, editors with the company who had vast experience in reaching the general public decided to simplify and rename the miniseries. The final result seems to have validated their approach. *Murder among the Mormons* reached millions of viewers.

If their editing and simplification had a downside, it is that the editors trimmed out some of the details that would appeal to those with greater-than-average interest in the topic, particularly those who considered themselves part of the Latter-day Saint historical community. Cutting the miniseries in half reduced some of the nuance and texture that might otherwise have been achieved.

Having been told the miniseries would debut on Netflix on March 3, 2021, I awoke in the wee hours of that morning with my wife and binge-watched all three episodes. Later, my youngest daughter hosted a watch party at her home, and we watched the entire miniseries again with her family.

Taken as a whole, I found the production to be a balanced mix of history and storytelling. Many people offered their opinions about the miniseries to me over succeeding weeks, pointing out what they liked and disliked about it. Some Latter-day Saints were bothered by

implications in one episode that the Church was behind the bombings and the assertion by someone from law enforcement that the Church had impeded the investigation.

I offered these viewers some thoughts for their consideration. The assertion that the Church was behind the bombings was, of course, laughable. But in October 1985—the period the filmmakers were trying to reflect in the miniseries—people were speculating wildly about the bombings and their causes, and the crazy idea that a Church agent planted the bombs was one of the conspiratorial stories that arose and was subsequently shot down.

The notion that Church officials impeded the investigation reflected a difference in point of view between some law enforcement officials and Church representatives. Having been on the scene in the Church Historical Department at the time in question, I knew the Church and its leaders had gone to great lengths to assist the investigation. At the same time, we were sensitive to the idea that many people thought Mark Hofmann was innocent, and we didn't want precipitous actions on the Church's part to give further impetus to another crazy theory that was circulating at the time: that the documents were real and that the Church was railroading Hofmann because Church leaders didn't like their contents.

To avoid giving steam to this baseless rumor, we followed advice from legal counsel and asked for subpoenas or other written orders before providing information and documents that investigators requested. Many in the law enforcement community seemed to understand why we adopted that approach and didn't seem bothered. Others interpreted the approach as not being cooperative. But the truth was we wanted to help law enforcement solve the crimes. Particularly in the Church Historical Department that I headed, the longer the investigation continued without resolution, the more pressure our staff felt and the more morale plummeted. The sooner we could bring a resolution to the case, the sooner we could refocus the department away from the bombings and toward helping researchers.

After the case was resolved through plea bargain, something that took place without our knowledge, I realized that one piece of information we had passed along had apparently not made it to investigators. In March 1986, as I explain in *Victims*, we had become aware that some journals of William E. McLellin had been purchased by the Church in the early twentieth century. When we made this discovery, we passed

the information up the line with the intention that it go to investigators. To me, this seemed to be a material fact since Hofmann had claimed to be selling a McLellin Collection containing these journals. The discovery of these journals meant Hofmann didn't have them as he claimed and added to the growing body of evidence that he was a fraud.

Why this information never made it to investigators is not clear to me since everyone in my reporting line wanted investigators to have it, including Elder Dallin H. Oaks, who was then one of our two advisors from the Quorum of the Twelve. But given the environment at the time, the information may simply have been lost in the flurry of the moment. Those of us who lived through those days know how hectic they were and how much was coming at us at the time.

But I do know this. After the plea bargain and my mutual agreement with Church leaders that I would write a book on the topic, I felt strongly that this fact needed to be revealed, and they agreed with me. When the book came out, my revelations about the McLellin journals created a media sensation.

To respond to media interest, we called a press conference in the east wing of the Church Office Building where the Church Historical Department was housed at the time. Media representatives flowed in with their video and still cameras, sound recorders, and notebooks. We laid out McLellin's journals on a table in the front of the conference room, and after describing the discovery to reporters, I invited any and all to come forward, don white gloves provided for the occasion, and read the original journals themselves.

In general, the response from busy reporters was to ask that I summarize the journals' contents, which I was happy to do. Instead of taking time to look through the journals, many looked at their watches, explained apologetically that they had deadlines to meet, and left. I empathized with them. Journalism is driven by deadlines, and they needed to move on to the next story, whatever it happened to be that day.

Because of public interest in the journals, however, we contacted two scholars—Jan Shippo, a renowned scholar of the Church who is dedicated to her own Methodist faith, and John W. Welch, at the time a professor of law at the J. Reuben Clark Law School and then editor in chief of *BYU Studies*—who agreed to partner in publishing the journals to a much wider audience than would likely come to see them in the Church Historical Department in that day before widespread internet access. In 1994, Dr. Shippo and Professor Welch published *The Journals*

of *William E. McLellin, 1831–1836*, as a joint imprint of BYU Studies and the University of Illinois Press.

Even after all these efforts to make the journals available, however, I read speculation on the part of some that I had personally delayed making these journals public until some statute of limitations had expired that supposedly protected me and others from criminal prosecution for obstructing the Hofmann investigation. I smiled at this conspiracy theory, knowing first that I had not intended to obstruct anything and second that whoever started the theory knew little about the law and less about how statutes of limitations operate—or they would not have ventured such a claim.

But such was the atmosphere in those days.

Another comment I received from people about *Murder among the Mormons* related to a statement I made in the film when asked about Church leaders not detecting Hofmann’s frauds in advance of the bombings. I gave a theological or doctrinal answer to the question that the filmmakers and editors included in the finished production. Essentially, I pointed out that while God can inform leaders that people are attempting to deceive them, he rarely does so.

That was the point of two epigraphs I included on the pages that divided *Victims* into two parts when I wrote it. Along with the heading “Part One,” which prefaced the story of what happened before the bombings, I quoted part of Doctrine and Covenants 10:37: “You cannot always tell the wicked from the righteous.” Even before the Church was organized, the Lord made this point to Joseph Smith. Thus, it should not be surprising that criminals or other sinners in the exercise of their agency should try to deceive Church leaders and succeed for a time.

Since publishing the book, I have heard people boast that they detected Hofmann’s frauds before the bombings. Certainly, Church leaders had concerns as well. Besides President Hinckley’s public expression of doubt about the Salamander Letter before the bombings, others inside the Church administrative structure expressed doubts too. As *Victims* points out, for example, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who died before the bombings, went to great lengths to prepare a memo casting doubt on the Joseph Smith III Blessing.¹⁴ And there were others, including document collector Brent Ashworth and professional Church critic Jerald Tanner, who joined in the chorus of calling the Salamander

14. Turley, *Victims*, 53–55.

Letter a fake. But I know of no one, inside or outside of the Church, who correctly labeled all of Hofmann's forgeries as such before the bombings.

When I wrote *Victims*, I included another epigraph under "Part Two." This one I extracted from Doctrine and Covenants 10:6: "The man in whom you have trusted has sought to destroy you." Again, this is the voice of the Lord telling Joseph Smith in 1828 or 1829 that a Church leader can be deceived by someone. That a Church leader can be the victim of a crime should not surprise anyone. Church leaders have been kidnapped, assaulted, battered, and murdered. Joseph Smith was killed by vigilantes. The Savior was crucified. People who feel bothered that Church leaders can be deceived suffer from false assumptions.

"Ministers of the gospel function best in an atmosphere of trust and love," then Elder Dallin H. Oaks observed after the case was solved. "In that kind of atmosphere, they fail to detect a few deceivers, but that is the price they pay to increase their effectiveness in counseling, comforting, and blessing the hundreds of honest and sincere people they see. It is better for a Church leader to be occasionally disappointed than to be constantly suspicious."¹⁵

The two epigraphs included in *Victims* both come from a section of the Doctrine and Covenants dealing with the loss of the Book of Lehi, often called "the 116 pages," which were in the handwriting of Martin Harris. As early as Hofmann's full-time mission to England, he told people his goal was to find these pages. Some of Hofmann's forgeries aimed to lay a foundation for forging this Holy Grail of Latter-day Saint manuscripts. The Salamander Letter and other Hofmann forgeries provided the only substantial samples of Martin Harris's handwriting beyond a few signatures.

As I wrote at the end of *Victims*, "In Joseph Smith's revelation about the lost 116 pages, those who planned to alter the manuscript were said to have 'laid a cunning plan, thinking to destroy the work of God.' The revelation, however, foretold that their fate would be 'to catch themselves in their own snare.' Believers and unbelievers alike could sense both justice and irony in the fact that Hofmann's own bomb curtailed his criminal career."¹⁶

As co-director Jared Hess said of *Murder among the Mormons*, "In the end, the good guys win and the bad man goes to jail, with the

15. Turley, *Victims*, 344.

16. Turley, *Victims*, 345.

exception of the heartbreaking aspect of the amazing people in our community who were innocent and lost their lives due to the calloused acts of this horrible person.”¹⁷ When the case ended, we came to understand that Mark Hofmann was a heartless killer who for selfish purposes took the lives of two innocent people and damaged the lives of many others, including especially the family members of the murder victims. Hofmann’s crimes had many victims, and his crimes continue to affect people today who made life-changing decisions based on documents that in the final analysis turned out to be forgeries.

Richard E. Turley Jr. is the former Assistant Church Historian and Recorder and Managing Director of the Church Historical Department, Family History Department, Public Affairs Department, and Church Communication Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

17. Tad Walch, “Jared Hess Explains His Turn to True Crime for Netflix Series ‘Murder among the Mormons,’” *Deseret News*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2021/2/23/22296381/murder-among-the-mormons-netflix-director-jared-hess-explains-turn-to-true-crime-mark-hofmann>.