Centenary of a Giant

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It has been 100 years since George Reynolds published his massive work, *A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon*. Reynolds worked on this project, begun while serving a prison sentence for polygamy, over 21 years of his life. He tabulated virtually every word used in the Book of Mormon except a few of the most common words, and gave a portion of the sentence in which each cited word appeared. He himself paid all the printing costs.
It is just 100 years since George Reynolds’s massive work, *A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon*, came from the press in Salt Lake City. In some ways it might be considered the premier reference work for Latter-day Saint students of the Book of Mormon yet produced. “The amount of patient, painstaking labor required for the production of this magnificent work will never be known to the general reader. Only the close student of the Nephite scriptures will ever really appreciate it.”

The anniversary calls for a tribute to a remarkable pioneer in the careful analysis of the Nephite scripture. In the last five years alone, FARMS has published 33 books, totaling more than 10,000 pages. Such an outpouring of publications overshadows older studies from the pre-computer age. But authors today have so many conveniences—word processing computers, spell-check software programs, photocopy machines, digital color-photo reproduction, professional designers, and high-speed presses—that we are likely to undervalue what publishing a study on the Book of Mormon entailed a century ago.

Preparation of the manuscript for Reynolds’s concordance spanned 21 years of his life. The conditions under which he began his work were often deplorable. He began the project while in the unheated Utah State Prison serving an 18-month sentence for having more than one wife. His “computer” was a pen and sheaf of paper. The manuscript was not typewritten until it had been completed.

In order to provide helpful context, Reynolds printed a portion of the sentence in which each cited word appeared. Virtually every word used in the Book of Mormon is tabulated except a few of the most common words (e.g., *a, an, the*). In only a few instances did he overlook a citation (e.g., he missed *exceeding* in Helaman 3:3 and 3:4).

Reynolds remarked, “In the direct work of arrangement, etc., I have received but little aid from others. . . . I have deemed it essential to entire correctness to compare every passage as it appeared in the proof sheets with the same passage in the Sacred Record.” Such meticulous proofreading, after the original tabulation of the references, means that Reynolds must have read every word of the Book of Mormon hundreds of times. Like many others since his time who have processed massive volumes of detail, Reynolds confessed that had he realized at the outset the amount of labor involved in preparing such a work he “would undoubtedly have hesitated before commencing so vast, so tedious and so costly a work.”

Still, his intent was not to build a career as a writer or to earn royalties. Rather, he felt that his volume was a “necessity as a help to the study of the Divine Work whose name it bears.” Yet the concordance did not consume his life as a writer. He published some 90 articles and books mainly on the Book of Mormon during the years while he was preparing the manuscript.

Moreover, no institutional publisher backed him. He himself paid all the costs. The printing plates alone cost nearly $3,000, and, he noted dryly, “I have but little hope while I live of receiving this amount back through sales of the book, to say nothing of the other expenses such as printing and binding.”

All this was accomplished...
while he was employed as Secretary to the First Presidency of the LDS Church. For 10 of the 21 years while he prepared his masterwork, he was a General Authority, one of the seven Presidents of the Seventy. He also labored at times as associate editor of the *Deseret News* and as assistant editor of *The Juvenile Instructor*, in addition to meeting important civic responsibilities and caring for three wives and 32 children.

There is a striking similarity in some ways between his life and that of fellow President of the Seventy B. H. Roberts. Both began their lives in disadvantaged conditions in England. George Reynolds was baptized at age 14, unknown to his parents, who violently opposed the church. As a young man he emigrated to America in 1865 and walked across the plains to Utah in a party of three men. Both Reynolds and Roberts were entangled with the law over plural marriage. Both were educated, almost entirely by self-effort, far above the level of most immigrants of similar background. Both were productive writers and editors for many years and were vigorous witnesses of the truthfulness and value of the Book of Mormon.

Because of his strenuous labors, George Reynolds died in 1909, at age 68, after a physical breakdown caused by overwork. The *Concordance*, at its centennial, remains a nobler and more appropriate monument to this pioneer of Book of Mormon studies than any cemetery monument bearing his name. 

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**New Approaches to Teaching and Learning the Book of Mormon**

The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* solicits short contributions by teachers of the Book of Mormon explaining successful methods they have used to help classes or individual students gain more enlightened, more memorable, and deeper understanding of the Nephite record and its messages than is attained in the typical class lecture format.

Each contribution should be 200 to 1,000 words in length. If more than one approach or method is submitted by one person, each should be independently stated. The *Journal* staff may edit or combine statements from several contributors when necessary to eliminate redundancy. If enough valuable contributions are received, they may be presented in the *Journal* in the form of a continuing department, amalgamated into one article, or made part of a special issue on teaching and learning.