1-1-1981

Authorship of the History of Joseph Smith: A Review Essay

Howard C. Searle

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

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol21/iss1/8

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in BYU Studies Quarterly by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Authorship of the History of Joseph Smith: A Review Essay

Howard C. Searle


Reviewed by Howard C. Searle, Church Educational System college curriculum writer and instructor, Salt Lake Institute of Religion, adjacent to the University of Utah.

Leland Nelson has compiled an interesting narrative of first-person passages from the *History of the Church* in an attempt to expand the familiar “Joseph Smith Story” into an entire volume. In doing this he has included a great deal of material that was not authored by Joseph Smith at all. In spite of this fact, he claims on the dust cover and in the introduction that “this book is exactly what the title says it is—the personal journal or diary of Joseph Smith Junior.” Although he makes assertion that the book contains “Joseph’s own personal account of his feelings, revelations, persecutions . . . and day-to-day happenings,” and that it “assembles together into one handy volume the great majority of Joseph’s personal journal entries,” the *Journal of Joseph* is not taken directly from Joseph Smith’s diaries but from material written by scribes and the Church Historians for the Church annals. Mr. Nelson admits that “Joseph dictated most of his journal entries to scribes,” but the implications of this practice are totally ignored in the identification and description of the book’s contents.

Although Mr. Nelson has put together an engrossing—and apparently popular—first-person narrative of excerpts from the early Church annals, what is in the book has been grossly misrepresented in newspaper ads, radio spot commercials, and the introduction to the book. The compiler has (I hope unknowingly) become the promulgator of many misconceptions about the *History of the Church* that have been rather common among Latter-day Saints since about the turn of the century. In perpetuating some of these inaccurate and
misleading notions, Mr. Nelson is in the good company of many devoted speakers, teachers, and writers throughout the Church; but this does not excuse his failure to determine the exact origin, authorship, and nature of the material he has published as "Joseph's writings." Even a cursory examination of Dean C. Jessee's articles in BYU Studies 11 (Summer 1971): 439–73 and the Journal of Mormon History 3 (1976): 23–46 could have saved the compiler from making misleading claims about the contents of his publication.

Anyone familiar with the methodology involved in the compilation of the History of the Church will recognize that one of its main problems is the confused and misleading authorship. To quote reliably from this source, one should first answer two questions: (1) Who wrote the original source? and (2) How has it been edited for publication? Had Mr. Nelson pursued these questions, he would have immediately discovered that many of the first-person passages which he has quoted in Joseph's personal writings are neither the Prophet's personal writings nor even his dictations.

Although the responsibility for preserving and compiling the early history of the Church was officially delegated to the Church Recorder and Historian, Joseph Smith was the prime motivator behind the work. He called able men to the project, exhorted them in their duties regularly, and tried to compile his own personal history for inclusion in the Church annals. But in spite of the Prophet's strong desire to produce an appropriate history, he was handicapped from the very beginning by certain unfortunate circumstances and personal limitations that forced him to struggle against rather formidable odds for more than a decade before leaving the unfinished history to his successors.

One of the main liabilities that hampered the Prophet in his efforts to compile a history was his lack of formal education and writing skills. In an early autobiography he lamented that he had been "deprived of the benefit of an education" and "was merely instructed in reading, writing and the ground rules of arithmetic." Even into his adult life, he often apologized for his literary deficiencies. In writing to his wife in 1832, he asked her to excuse "my inability in conveying my ideas in writing" and in 1839 he wrote to her jokingly: "If you feel as I do you don’t care for the imperfection of

---


2. Joseph Smith Letterbook, 1832–1835, p. 1. Library-Archives of the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

102
my writing, for my part a word of consolation from any source is cordially received.'

The Prophet worked to overcome his literary shortcomings throughout his life as circumstances would permit, often occupying himself in reciting English and German lessons and in studying Hebrew.

The grammatical, vocabulary, and orthographic deficiencies of Joseph Smith were the cause of much editing, revising, and rewriting in nearly all of his published works. Cognizant that he needed help in his writing, the Prophet called men with writing experience and skill to aid him in the various literary projects of the Church. Over twenty-four scribes and ghostwriters are known to have assisted him during the fifteen years from 1829 to 1844—the period of his "writing" (see Table 1). In the division of stewardships in the kingdom, the Prophet believed it was entirely appropriate that the bulk of the recordkeeping and writing be turned over to others. An entry in his history for 1 March 1843 states: "On returning to my office after dinner, I spoke the following proverb: For a man to be great, he must not dwell on small things, though he may enjoy them; this shows that a Prophet cannot well be his own scribe, but must have someone write for him." In harmony with this philosophy of delegation, the Prophet observed in 1839, when James Mulholland was working with him on his history, "I was dictating history, I say dictating, for I seldom use the pen myself. I always dictate all my communications, but employ a scribe to write them." In the last months of his life he was reported as observing: "For the last three years I have a record of all my proceedings, for I have kept several good, faithful, and efficient clerks in constant employ: they have accompanied me everywhere, and carefully kept my history, and they have written down what I have done, where I have been and what I have said."

Retaining competent scribes was no easy task in the unsettled and often hazardous conditions of the early Church. Of more than a score of scribes who worked for the Prophet, nine left the Church

---

1Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 6 June 1832 and 21 March 1839, Church Archives.
4HC, 5: 298.
5HC, 4: 1.
6HC, 6: 409.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Beginning Date</th>
<th>Ending Date</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Martin Harris</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>Excommunicated in 1837; returned in 1870.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Cowdery</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Excommunicated in 1838; returned in 1848.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Whitmer</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Excommunicated in 1838.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sidney Rigdon</td>
<td>1830</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Excommunicated in 1844.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. W. Phelps</td>
<td>1831[?]</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Excommunicated in 1839; returned in 1841.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick G. Williams</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Excommunicated in 1839; returned in 1840.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parley P. Pratt</td>
<td>1832</td>
<td>[?]</td>
<td>Killed in Arkansas in 1857 while on a mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orson Hyde</td>
<td>1833</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Died an Apostle in Utah in 1878.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sylvester Smith</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Later called as one of the First Presidents of the Seventy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Parrish</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>Apostatized in 1838.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren A. Cowdery</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Left the Church in 1838 at the same time as his brother, Oliver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George W. Robinson</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>Released in 1840 and later left the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Mulholland</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>Died in 1839 while serving as a scribe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert B. Thompson</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>Died during his service as a scribe in 1841.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Coray</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>1841[?]</td>
<td>Taught school in Nauvoo and Utah; died in Utah in 1908.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Sloan</td>
<td>1840</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Died a faithful member in Utah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Died while Church Historian in Utah in 1854.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Clayton</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Died in Utah in 1879 after an active life in the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock</td>
<td>1843[?]</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Employed as a clerk most of his life; died in Utah in 1883.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(some keeping their work), several suffered extended debilitating illnesses, and three terminated their services in death (see Table 1).

To what extent are the sources, rough drafts, and manuscripts of the History of the Church the personal writing of Joseph Smith? As early as 1832 the Prophet established the precedent of keeping a personal diary and a letterbook, but only a few pages of these early sources are in his handwriting. Joseph began his earliest extant diary on 29 November 1832 with the caption on page 1: "Joseph Smith Jr's. Book for Record. Bought on 29th of November 1832 for the purpose to keep a minute account of all things that come under my observation." A few additional entries are in Joseph Smith’s handwriting, but most of this diary is in the handwriting of scribes. At the same time the Prophet commenced keeping this diary, he converted an earlier journal, which contained his earliest—partly holographic—account of the First Vision, into a letterbook, into which were copied his correspondence and a few other important Church documents. The diary and letterbook set a pattern for recordkeeping which Joseph Smith followed the rest of his life. A second diary, started by the Prophet in 1835, also contains a few holographic entries; but all of his subsequent diaries are in the handwriting of scribes. There are only thirty-five holographic pages in Joseph Smith’s diaries, representing only two percent of the content of his eight separate diaries. His letterbooks contain about ten pages of his own handwriting, and there is some holographic material in the "Kirtland Revelation Book” and the book of "The Law of the Lord." Except for these few pages, all the sources and manuscripts connected with the compilation of the History of the Church are in the handwriting of scribes (see Table 2).

Of the same genre as the Prophet’s diaries is the "Scriptory Book of Joseph Smith, Jr." which was written by George W. Robinson in 1837–1838, all in the third person. When this source was used in compiling the History of the Church, it was transposed into a first-person narrative of the Prophet. It is obviously a mistake to identify such sources as the Prophet’s personal dictation or writing.

If Joseph Smith did not personally write most of the material in his diaries and the manuscripts of his history, how much of it did he dictate? It is clear from the Prophet’s diaries, as well as the journals of the scribes, that he often dictated to his assistants, but it is equally clear that the scribes and clerks often composed and recorded information on their own. Many diary entries by the scribes were only

---

9Joseph Smith Diary, 27 November 1832 to 5 December 1834, Church Archives.
10Joseph Smith Letterbook, 1832–1835, Church Archives.
11Jeffrey O. Johnson, Register of the Joseph Smith Collection in the Church Archives (Salt Lake City: LDS Church Historical Department, 1973), p. 12.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church History Source</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Dates Kept</th>
<th>Scribes Writing the Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirtland Revelation</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1831–1834</td>
<td>Oliver Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams, Orson Hyde others; corrections by Joseph Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of Commandments</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>Orson Hyde, others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and Covenants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>n.d.</td>
<td>John Whitmer, William W. Phelps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirtland Council Minutes</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>1832–1837</td>
<td>Frederick G. Williams, Orson Hyde, Warren A. Cowdery, George W. Robinson others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Diary</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1832–1834</td>
<td>Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, Frederick G. Williams, Parley P. Pratt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Letterbook (1829–1835)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>1832–1835</td>
<td>Joseph Smith, Orson Hyde, Frederick G. Williams, Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriarchal Blessings</td>
<td>9 vols.</td>
<td>1834–1846</td>
<td>Oliver Cowdery, Orson Hyde, William W. Phelps, Sylvester Smith, Warren A. Cowdery, George W. Robinson, James Mulholland, Robert B. Thompson, Howard Coray, James Sloan, Thomas Bullock, others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Church Archives, Jessee, "Joseph Smith's History," p. 463; Johnson, Register of the Joseph Smith Collection.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church History Source</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Scribes Writing the Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Diary</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>1835–1836</td>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oliver Cowdery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warren Parrish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sylvester Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warren A. Cowdery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church History</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>1835–1836</td>
<td>Frederick G. Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warren Parrish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Warren A. Cowdery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Letterbook (1829–1843)</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>1837–1843</td>
<td>James Mulholland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert B. Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Howard Coray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>William Clayton, others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scriptory Book of Joseph Smith, Jr.*</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1837–1838</td>
<td>George W. Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the Kirtland Camp**</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Elias Smith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Far West Record (1830–1844)***</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>1838–1844</td>
<td>Oliver Cowdery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John Whitmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>W. W. Phelps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>John Corrill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orson Hyde</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harvey Whitlock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sidney Gilbert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>William E. McLellan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frederick G. Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orson Pratt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Marsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Dustin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elias Higbee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Harvey Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nathan West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ebenezer Robinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hosea Stout</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This book was later used for Patriarchal Blessings, vol. 9.

**Although incorporated into the History of the Church by Willard Richards and B. H. Roberts, the original manuscript cannot be located. Pages indicated are in the published history.

***Although the title page of the Far West Record is dated 6 April 1838, it covers a chronological period extending back to 9 June 1830. The only existing manuscript copy is in the handwriting of a later scribe who copied the minutes and notes of the earlier clerks into a bound journal.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church History Source</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Dates Kept</th>
<th>Scribes Writing the Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Diary</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1838–1839</td>
<td>James Mulholland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Diary</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1839</td>
<td>James Mulholland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauvoo High Council Minutes</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1839–1840</td>
<td>Henry G. Sherwood, Hosea Stout, Randolf Alexander, Robert B. Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauvoo Municipal Court Docket</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>1841–1845</td>
<td>James Sloan, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauvoo City Council Proceedings</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>1841–1845</td>
<td>James Sloan, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Diary</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>1842–1843</td>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Law of the Lord***</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>1842–1845[?]</td>
<td>Joseph Smith, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock[?]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1842–1844</td>
<td>Eliza R. Snow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Diary</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith Diary</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>1843–1844</td>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith History</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

****This source was used by Willard Richards in compiling the *History of the Church* and by B. H. Roberts in editing the *History* from 1902 to 1912. Thomas Bullock Memorandum Book, 30 January 1845, Church Archives; *HC*, 5: 420–21.
brief, incomplete notes—some in the third person—that had to be deciphered and filled out by the later compilers of the Church annals. Much of this editing was done after the original writers and the Prophet were dead. Such material would hardly qualify as verbatim dictation.

At the time James Mulholland commenced writing "The History of Joseph Smith," he was also keeping the Prophet's diary. He recorded for June 1839: "Monday 10th began to study and prepare to dictate history—Tuesday commenced to dictate and I to write history Wednesday Thursday Friday so employed."\(^1\)\(^2\) It is clear from this diary, as well as from Mulholland's own journal, that this early part of the history was dictated;\(^3\) but did this process continue throughout the compilation of the history? If the experience of Howard Coray, who worked on the history in 1840–1841, was similar to that of other writers, it is apparent that the scribes did much more than passively take dictation; they took an active role in the actual composition of the history. Howard Coray was assigned with Edwin D. Woolley to "write up the Church History," and the two men moved into Joseph Smith's new office in the upper story of his store. According to Brother Coray, they proceeded as follows:

Bro. Woolley and myself, were busily engaged in compiling the church history. The Prophet was to furnish all the materials; and our business, was not only to combine, and arrange in chronological [sic] order, but to spread out or amplify not a little, in as good historical style as may be.\(^4\)

It was Edwin Woolley's responsibility to organize the material and prepare a rough draft, which was then submitted to Howard Coray for correction and refinement. Brother Coray soon discovered that Brother Woolley "knew nothing whatever of grammar," but he concluded that he would make the best "of a bad job" and work with Brother Woolley in rewriting his material. But when Edwin Woolley saw how much of his writing had to be corrected, thrown out, or redone, he became discouraged and quit; and Brother Coray had to find a new partner.\(^5\) He succeeded in obtaining the services of a Dr. Miller, who worked with him until they had "used up all the historical matter" which the Prophet had given them.\(^6\) Howard Coray further observed: "And, as peculiar [sic] circumstances

---

1\(^3\) Joseph Smith Diary, 10–14 June 1839, Church Archives. This diary entry was changed to a first-person account of Joseph Smith in the published history (HC, 3: 375–77).
2\(^3\) James Mulholland Journal, 10–14 June 1839, Church Archives.
3\(^3\) Howard Coray Autobiography, Church Archives; also Dean Jessee, BYU Studies 17 (Spring 1977): 346.
4\(^3\) Ibid.
5\(^3\) Ibid.
### TABLE 3
Scribes Writing the Manuscript History of Joseph Smith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>MS Book</th>
<th>MS Pages</th>
<th>History of the Church Vol.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Mulholland</td>
<td>A - 1</td>
<td>1-59</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert B. Thompson</td>
<td>A - 1</td>
<td>60-75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>118-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. W. Phelps</td>
<td>A - 1</td>
<td>75-130</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>124-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>A - 1</td>
<td>131-33†</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note A</td>
<td></td>
<td>Omitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note B</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note C</td>
<td></td>
<td>9-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. W. Phelps</td>
<td>A - 1</td>
<td>135-57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>195-222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>A - 1</td>
<td>158-553</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>222-493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B - 1</td>
<td>553-812</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1-160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>161-529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock</td>
<td>B - 1</td>
<td>812-49</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>56-466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C - 1</td>
<td>850-1361</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1-610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D - 1</td>
<td>1362-1486</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1-291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Hawkins</td>
<td>D - 1</td>
<td>1486-1547</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>292-384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert L. Campbell</td>
<td>D - 1</td>
<td>1547-1636</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>384-556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E - 1</td>
<td>1637-2028</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1-349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Grimshaw</td>
<td>F - 1</td>
<td>1-150</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>349-548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Hawkins</td>
<td>F - 1</td>
<td>151-89</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>548-631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F - 1</td>
<td>190-204</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F - 1</td>
<td>228-304</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>129-243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Jessee, "Joseph Smith's History," p. 441; HC, 7 vols.; Manuscript History of the Church, Church Archives.

†Notes A, B, and C were added by Willard Richards in 1842 and are not in chronological order. They were not included in the earliest publication of the History in the Times and Seasons in April 1842 and may have been written too late to be included. Notes B and C were added in B. H. Roberts's edited version of the History in the early 1900s, but Note A, which relates to Joseph Smith's early boyhood, does not fit smoothly into the chronological structure, which was, perhaps, the reason for its omission by B. H. Roberts.
prevented his giving attention to his part of the business we of necessity discontinued our labors.’”

Because of numerous setbacks and difficulties at Nauvoo, progress on the history was very slow until the appointment of Willard Richards as the Prophet’s “private Sect. and Historian” on 21 December 1842. At this time the history had been written only to 1 November 1831. Dr. Richards’s handwriting begins on page 158 of Book A–1 in the manuscript, which is page 222 of volume 1 of the History of the Church (see tables 3 and 4).

At the same time he started writing the manuscript of the “History of Joseph Smith,” Willard Richards also assumed the responsibility for keeping President Smith’s diary—a project which he continued right up to the time of the Prophet’s martyrdom. Dr. Richards boarded with the Prophet for several weeks in 1841 and later shared President Smith’s upstairs office in the brick store at Nauvoo. He undoubtedly obtained much information for the diaries and manuscript history directly from the Prophet, but he frequently recorded this material in his own words—usually in abbreviated notes. As the official Church Recorder and Historian, Willard Richards also worked independently in recording the minutes of meetings, longhand abridgments of sermons, descriptions of events, correspondence, and many other items for later inclusion in the manuscript history. No one in the Church at this time had mastered shorthand sufficiently to take down sermons, conversations, and other statements word for word, so most of the material Dr. Richards recorded was in the form of abridged and often abbreviated notes that had to be deciphered and filled out for inclusion in the manuscript history. Unfortunately, Dr. Richards did not live to complete the emendation and amplification of his own notes, and the task was left to his successors in the Church Historian’s Office.

At the time of the Martyrdom, Willard Richards had completed the manuscript history to page 812 in Book B–1. Book A–1 was terminated on page 553, to leave room for addenda, and the pagination was continued consecutively through volumes B–1 to E–1 (see Table 3). At this point Dr. Richards had completed the history to 5 August 1838, but it had been published in the Times and Seasons only up to the events of 7 January 1832 (see tables 4 and 5). In terms of pages in the original manuscript history, only thirty-five percent had been written up to the time of the Prophet’s death, and none of this was in his own handwriting.

17Ibid.
18Willard Richards Journal, 21 December 1842, Church Archives.
### TABLE 4
Time Schedule for Writing the Manuscript History of Joseph Smith

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Persons Compiling and Copying the History</th>
<th>Pages Written in MS</th>
<th>Time Period Covered in MS</th>
<th>When Written</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compilation of the History before Joseph Smith's Death on 27 June 1844</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
<td>A-1, 1-59</td>
<td>23 Dec. 1805 to 26 Sept. 1830</td>
<td>11 June to 27 Oct. 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Mulholland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
<td>A-1, 60-75</td>
<td>26 Sept. to late Oct. 1830</td>
<td>3 Oct. 1840 to 27 Aug. 1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert B. Thompson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Coray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
<td>A-1, 75-157</td>
<td>Oct. 1830 to 1 Nov. 1831</td>
<td>1 8 4 1 - 1 8 4 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. W. Phelps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
<td>A-1, 158-</td>
<td>1 Nov. 1831 to 5 Aug. 1838</td>
<td>21 Dec. 1842 to 2 Mar. 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>B-1, 812</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Compilation of the History after Joseph Smith's Death on 27 June 1844</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>B-1, 812-</td>
<td>6 Aug. 1838 to 1 Mar. 1843</td>
<td>15 June 1845 to 1 Dec. 1853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock</td>
<td>D-1, 1486</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George A. Smith</td>
<td>D-1, 1486-</td>
<td>1 Mar. 1843 to 8 Aug. 1844</td>
<td>18 April 1854 to 30 Jan. 1857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilford Woodruff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock</td>
<td>F-1, 304</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Hawkins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Campbell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Grimshaw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 5
Publication of Joseph Smith's History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where Published</th>
<th>Volume and Number</th>
<th>Publication Dates</th>
<th>Period of History Covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Earliest Publication at Nauvoo</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times and Seasons</td>
<td>3, no. 10</td>
<td>15 March 1842 to 23 Dec. 1805</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5, no. 9</td>
<td>1 May 1844 to 7 Jan. 1832</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Early Republication in England from the Times and Seasons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennial Star</td>
<td>3, no. 2</td>
<td>June 1842 to 23 Dec. 1805</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5, no. 12</td>
<td>May 1845 to 3 Nov. 1831§</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication after Joseph Smith's Death at Nauvoo</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times and Seasons</td>
<td>5, no. 13</td>
<td>15 July 1844 to 8 Jan. 1832</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6, no. 23</td>
<td>15 Feb. 1846 to 11 Aug. 1834</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication after the Exodus to Salt Lake City</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deseret News</td>
<td>2, no. 1</td>
<td>15 Nov. 1851 to 11 Aug. 1834</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7, no. 46</td>
<td>20 Jan. 1858 to 8 Aug. 1844</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Republication in England from the Times and Seasons and Deseret News</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennial Star</td>
<td>14, no. 8§§</td>
<td>15 April 1852 to 4 Nov. 1831</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25, no. 18</td>
<td>2 May 1863 to 8 Aug. 1844</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§The Times and Seasons, vol. 5, no. 9 (1 May 1844), pp. 512–14, contained the last installment of the "History" published during Joseph Smith's lifetime; but this was omitted from the Millennial Star in the republication of the "History" in 1845. It was included later when the series was resumed in the Star, vol. 14, no. 8 (15 April 1852), pp. 113–17.

§§When the "History of Joseph Smith" was resumed in the Star in 1852, many of the Saints in England were recent converts to the Church who did not have the seven- to ten-year-old editions of the Star with the earlier segments of the "History." To remedy this situation, Franklin D. Richards, editor of the Millennial Star, published an eighty-eight page supplement to volume 14 in 1852 containing all of the earlier, scarce installments.

113
As Willard Richards and his chief assistant, Thomas Bullock, commenced the posthumous writing of the "History of Joseph Smith," a rough draft was prepared that is still well preserved in the Church Archives. If Coray's experience was typical, preliminary drafts were used in compiling the history prior to this time, but if this were the case, none of them has survived, nor is there any specific reference to such drafts or outlines by the scribes who wrote the final polished manuscripts. The surviving rough draft is written on loose foolscap, and the pagination periodically starts over again (see Table 6). The rough draft begins with 6 August 1838 and is in the handwriting of Willard Richards. This preliminary draft made it possible for him to leave most of the tedious writing and copying to Thomas Bullock. Dr. Richards inserted cross-references to materials from various sources that were to be copied into the completed history and also made many corrections and additions right in the rough draft. Thomas Bullock started copying the history into the manuscript history journal for the same date that Dr. Richards started writing the rough draft—6 August 1838 (see Table 4). Later the rough draft switches abruptly to the handwriting of Thomas Bullock (see Table 6), and it appears he was composing the history at this point, but the journals of Elders Richards and Bullock explain the actual procedure: Dr. Richards suffered an extended illness during the winter of 1845–46, and, in his anxiety to continue the history, called Thomas Bullock to his home, got out of his sickbed, sat in a chair, and dictated the history for Elder Bullock to record in the rough draft.19

Although Willard Richards had proceeded with the history after the Prophet's death, he continued the first-person narrative that characterized the Prophet's early dictation. He was apparently instructed by the Prophet in Carthage Jail to continue "the plan of compiling the history" which was "commenced by himself."20 Having been called as the Prophet's "private Sect. and Historian," Elder Richards apparently felt that he had the necessary investiture of authority to permit him to write for, and as if he were, the Prophet Joseph Smith. Throughout the compilation of the history, Elder Richards, as well as the later writers, stuck devotedly to the first-person style commenced by the Prophet. The notes of Elder Richards and other scribes in the Prophet's diaries were filled out in accordance with this format, but this was not the only material that was modified for amalgamation into the first-person narrative of the history. Some of the other sources utilized in its compilation were later summarized

19Ibid., 3 January 1846; Historian's Office Journal. 3–12 January 1846, Church Archives.
20George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1836, Church Archives.

114
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Written by</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Historical Period Covered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>1-77</td>
<td>6 Aug. 1838 to 30 Dec. 1839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>1-19</td>
<td>1 Jan. 1840 to 30 Dec. 1840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>1-23</td>
<td>1 Jan. 1841 to 30 Dec. 1841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>1-19</td>
<td>1 Jan. 1842 to 30 June 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>1-24</td>
<td>1 July 1842 to 31 Dec. 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willard Richards</td>
<td>1-13</td>
<td>1 Jan. 1843 to 29 Jan. 1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock</td>
<td>13-26</td>
<td>30 Jan. 1843 to 3 Mar. 1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock</td>
<td>1-89</td>
<td>1 Mar. 1843 to 29 Dec. 1843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Grimshaw</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>1 Jan. 1844 to 27 Jan. 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock#</td>
<td>7-72</td>
<td>1 Feb. 1844 to 21 June 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Grimshaw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Hawkins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert C. Campbell</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Bullock</td>
<td>1-76</td>
<td>22 June 1844 to 28 June 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Grimshaw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Hawkins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert L. Campbell</td>
<td>1-18</td>
<td>22 June 1844 to 8 Aug. 1844</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Rough draft Manuscript History of the Church, Church Archives. Dean C. Jessee, senior historical associate, Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of Church History, Brigham Young University, assisted in identifying the handwriting of the different scribes.

#Although Thomas Bullock was George A. Smith's chief clerk, the other clerks who worked in the Historian's Office sometimes wrote in the rough draft.

115
by George A. Smith, who succeeded Willard Richards as Church Historian in 1854:

The plan of compiling the history of Joseph Smith from the journals kept by his clerks, Willard Richards, William Clayton, Wilford Woodruff, and Thomas Bullock, was commenced by himself, extracting items of necessary information in regard to general and particular movements from the Times and Seasons, Millennial Star, Wasp, Neighbor, and other publication, extracts from City Councils, Municipal Courts, and Mayor’s Dockets, and Legion Records, which were all kept under his direction; also the movement of the Church as found in Conference Minutes, High Council records, and the records of the several quorums, together with letters and copies preserved on file; also noted remarkable occurrences throughout the world, and compiled them under date of transaction, according to the above plan which he while in prison just previous to his murder requested Elder Willard Richards to continue.21

Comparison of these sources with the History of the Church reveals that passages from many of them were converted into first-person accounts of Joseph Smith, and although such passages appear to be the direct discourse or writing of the Prophet, they are really the compositions of others.

Did Joseph Smith have an opportunity to review carefully all the history written for him by his scribes? Both circumstantial and documentary evidence suggest that the Prophet did not have the opportunity to review and revise very much of the history. On 1 April 1845, Brigham Young commenced the practice of reviewing the history for publication. His history states:

Tuesday, April 1, 1845.—I commenced revising the History of Joseph Smith at Brother Richards’ office: Elder Heber C. Kimball and George A. Smith were with me. President Joseph Smith had corrected forty-two pages before his massacre. It afforded us great satisfaction to hear Brother Richards read the history of the infancy of the church. Adjourned at eleven p.m. having read one hundred and forty pages in Book ‘A’.22

This beginning of Brigham Young’s “revising the history” is also corroborated by a note at the top of page 42 of the manuscript: “1845 April 1—Commenced reading.”23 Page 42 is in the handwriting of James Mulholland, the first scribe of the manuscript, and deals with events connected with the Church’s first conference on 1 June 1830.24

21Ibid.
22HC, 7: 389. Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and George A. Smith all refer to this day’s activities in their journal entries for 1 April 1845.
23Manuscript History of the Church, A–1, p. 42, Church Archives.
24This part of the manuscript is now HC, 1: 85–86.
Brigham Young's statement that "Joseph Smith had corrected forty-two pages before his massacre" would suggest that the Prophet entrusted a great deal of the work on his history to his scribes and the Church historians and that at the time of his death he was hundreds of pages behind in reviewing the manuscript. Although the history was "revised" by President Young "almost without any alteration," Brigham continued the practice of allowing clerks to write in the first person for Joseph until it was finished in 1857.25

Elders Richards and Bullock completed the history to page 1485 in Book D-1 before "sorting and packing books for the journey west," on 20 January 1846.26 It was not until 1 December 1853 that Willard Richards got back to the task of compiling the history in Utah. Thomas Bullock describes the Doctor's effort in a marginal note in the manuscript: "Decb. 1, 1853 Willard Richards wrote one line of history, being sick at the time—and was never able to do any more."27 This last line of history written by Elder Richards brought the historical narrative to 1 March 1843; the history beyond that date was compiled by his successor George A. Smith, the cousin of the Prophet. Willard Richards died on 11 March 1854; George A. Smith was sustained as the new Church Historian at general conference on 7 April 1854 and commenced compiling the history on 18 April 1854.28

George A. Smith continued Willard Richards's practice of preparing a rough draft. As he explained the process: "Thomas Bullock acted with me as Chief Clerk. . . . His pen wrote the principal part of the rough manuscript from my dictation."29 Jonathan Grimshaw, Leo Hawkins, and Robert L. Campbell, who were all clerks in the Historian's Office, also assisted in writing the "rough manuscript" (see Table 6). George A. Smith's handwriting cannot be identified in any of the manuscripts compiled under his direction.

George A. deeply regretted that Willard Richards had not been able to complete the "History of Joseph Smith."30 In the following letter, he explained some of the difficulties encountered in trying to complete the history:

It seems as though all the contrivances that the devil could invent had been brought to bear from the day of Joseph and Hyrum's death to prevent their history being compiled. I have six clerks engaged in the

---
25George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1856, Church Archives.
26Historian's Office Journal, 20 January 1846, Church Archives.
27Manuscript History of the Church, D-1, p. 1486, Church Archives.
28Ibid., marginal note.
29George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1856, Church Archives.
30Deseret News, 19 October 1854, p. 2.
office and it keeps my brain in a perfect whirl to keep track of them or they of me and not get the cart before the horse. Many records are nearly obliterated by time damp and dirt. Others lost. Some half worked into mouse nests, and many important events were never written except in the hearts of those who were concerned. Joseph said it would be impossible for any man ever to write his history. I am doing the best I can toward it and feel the Spirit of it as much as I ever did to preach. [S]o do the clerks in the office.31

In March of 1856 George A. wrote that the history of Joseph was “difficult to collate” and that it was “a long, tedious and difficult task, as his papers, many of them have been badly kept, and seriously damaged during our migratory movements since his death.”32 A month later he wrote Wilford Woodruff:

The severe application of thought to the principle of the History, the exercise of memory etc., have caused me to suffer much from a nervous headache or inflammation of the brain, and my application of mind being in exercise both day and night, deprived me of a great portion of necessary sleep.33

George A. encountered special problems in trying to reconstruct the notes of Willard Richards in the Prophet’s diaries. Many entries were only brief notes—sometimes difficult to read—which required considerable amplification to complete the meaning in an acceptable writing style. In all this reconstruction George A. maintained the first-person narrative that characterized the history.

Willard Richards had died before he had the opportunity of reconstructing any of the sermons of Joseph Smith from his own notes. One difficult phase of George A. Smith’s work was to prepare these sermons for inclusion in the manuscript history. “[Jonathan] Grimshaw sorted and filed the papers,” George A. reported, “and carefully amalgamated the principle part of the discourses of President Smith and others from the various reports . . . , and put them in shape to be filled up by me.”34 He further explained:

I have filled up all the reports of sermons by Prest. Joseph Smith and others from minutes or sketches taken at the time in longhand by Dr. Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, Miss Eliza R. Snow & c., which was an immense labor, requiring the deepest thought and the closest application, as there were mostly only two or three words (about half written) to a sentence. The greatest care has been taken to convey the ideas in the prophet’s style as near as possible, and in no case has the sentiment been varied that I

31Church Historian's Office Letterbook, 1854–1861, pp. 106-07, Church Archives.
32George A. Smith to Cyrus Wheelock, March 1855, Church Archives.
33George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1856, Church Archives.
34Ibid.
know of, as I heard most of his discourses myself, was on the most inti-
timate terms with him, have attained a most vivid recollection of his
teachings, and was well acquainted with his principles and motives.35

Joseph Smith was not known to speak from a prepared text, and
inasmuch as no one was able to take down his sermons completely in
shorthand, there are no verbatim records of his discourses extant.

Wilford Woodruff was called as Assistant Church Historian in
1856, and although he contributed information from his journals and
collected other materials for the history, his handwriting does not ap-
pear in the rough or completed manuscripts (see tables 3 and 6).

Up to the end of the nineteenth century, the only place the
"History of Joseph Smith" could be found was in the early perio-
dicals of the Church, where it had been published in serial form
from 1842 to 1863. The diaries of Joseph Smith had provided the
basic skeletal outline for the "History of Joseph Smith," which com-
prises the first six volumes (A–F) of the Manuscript History of the
Church. Following several aborted attempts to compile and publish a
history of the Church, the "History of Joseph Smith" had been
started on 11 June 1839 and completed by 30 January 1857. Almost
twenty years in the process of compilation and publication, the
history was produced by a series of scribes, clerks, and Church
historians, who labored sporadically on the project during a very dif-
ficult period of persecution, pioneer travel and western coloniza-
tion (see Table 3). The history was first published serially in the Times
and Seasons and the Deseret News from 1842 to 1858, and it was
reprinted in the Millennial Star from 1842 to 1863 (see Table 5). Not
only were these installments scattered inconveniently through more
than two decades of periodicals, but the publications themselves were
virtually unobtainable.

After the deaths of the original compilers of the history, there
was a tendency in the Church to forget or ignore the methodology of
the early scribes and Church historians who wrote it and to attribute
all of the first-person material in the history to Joseph Smith himself.
Orson Pratt, Church Historian from 1874 to 1881, was well ac-
quainted with the men who worked on the history and was familiar
with their procedures. When a Church member wrote to him to in-
quire about a rather obvious error in the history, he frankly admitted:

The discrepancy in the history to which you refer may have occurred
through the ignorance or carelessness of the historian or transcriber. It is
true that history reads as though the Prophet himself was writing: but

35Ibid.

119
the Prophet was a slow and awkward writer; and many events recorded
were written by his scribes who undoubtedly trusted too much to their
memories, and the items probably were not sufficiently scanned by Bro.
Joseph, before they got into print.36

Whether by ignorance or design, Elder Pratt’s successors in the
Historian’s Office apparently said nothing about the methodology in-
volved in compiling the early history of the Church, and by the end of
the nineteenth century it was frequently assumed that all the history
had been written or dictated by the Prophet.
By the turn of the century the project of publishing the entire
history in accessible book form was undertaken by George Q. Can-
non, a member of the First Presidency. In an unpublished preface,
he asserted that the history “was written by the Prophet himself or
under his own direction during his lifetime.” He further explained:
“While it is in a sense personal and autobiographical, it nevertheless
constitutes the true history of the Church and its happenings, stated
in his language, up to within a very few days of his martyrdom.”37 In
less than fifty years from the time the history was completed, the
methods involved in its compilation were either obscured or ignored
to the point that it was commonly assumed the history was the per-
sonal writing or dictation of the Prophet. In spite of several recent ar-
ticles on the subject, nothing has significantly modified this belief as
far as the general Church membership is concerned.
The History of the Church in its present form was edited by
B. H. Roberts, who was assigned the project on 23 May 1901, about
six weeks after the death of George Q. Cannon.38 The first six
volumes, containing the “History of Joseph Smith” were published
from 1902 to 1912, and although Elder Roberts made significant con-
tributions to the history through his editing, he also created many
problems. His most serious shortcoming was that he did not come to
grips with the question of the history’s authorship nor the
methodology associated with its original compilation. He not only
perpetuated the myth that the entire narrative was the Prophet’s own
writing or words,39 but he also made additions and deletions right in
the text, without any annotation, as if these too were the product of
the Prophet’s own mind.40 In doing this, he corrupted the text as he
tried to correct it and actually widened the gap between the real

36Onson Pratt to John Christensen, 11 March 1876, Church Archives.
37George Q. Cannon, Unfinished preface to a history of the Church, c.1901, Church Archives.
39B. H. Roberts, ed., History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret
Book Co., 1902), 1: title page.
40Ibid., 1: iv.

120
Joseph Smith and what was being published as his personal writing. If Joseph Smith's declaration that "no man knows my history," were true in his own lifetime, it was even more true after Roberts's revisions, for the Prophet's actual personality, character, and style were further obscured by an often misleading editorial screen.

B. H. Roberts should have gone back to the original sources to ascertain the actual origin and authorship of the materials being edited; misleading transpositions of the other men's words into first-person statements of Joseph Smith should have been at least identified and in some cases corrected; Roberts's own modifications should have been identified or confined to the footnotes, so his work could be distinguished from that of the former compilers; variant passages in the manuscripts should have been noted and evaluated; and the whole editorial process explained and annotated more clearly. Elder Roberts's editorial work is at best incomplete and at worst misleading.

However, if the "History of Joseph Smith" fails to measure up to modern-day standards for historical writing and editing, it only reflects the shortcomings of other mid-nineteenth century historical works in the United States, and its compilers and editors should not be judged too harshly. The accepted standards of modern historians and writers as they relate to plagiarism, ghostwriting, documentation, use of quotation marks, and respect for the integrity of original sources are comparatively recent developments not widely implemented even among professional historians until almost fifty years after the compilation of the "History of Joseph Smith," and such critical standards were not reflected in the works of nonprofessional historians until some time after B. H. Roberts did his editing.41

Despite its deficiencies, the History of the Church is an excellent collection of sources on Joseph Smith and early Mormonism. Although the authorship of these sources is often confused and deceptive, the history was nearly always written by eyewitneses, and it is commendably accurate and reliable in its factual content. When George A. Smith and Wilford Woodruff bore testimony "that the History of Joseph Smith is true, and is one of the most authentic histories ever written," they were certainly correct as far as the recording of events and details is concerned.42

42HC, 7: 242–43.
As a narrative and witness of the Latter-day restoration, the "History of Joseph Smith" has contributed significantly to the faith and understanding of its readers since the time it made its first appearance in the Church’s periodicals over a century ago. The great value of this enduring work should justify a painstaking and forthright re-editing, which would identify the history’s authors and sources and would prevent the publication and popularity of such misleading books as the *Journal of Joseph*.

Most of the original sources used in the compilation of the history are in an excellent state of preservation in the Church Archives, and it is still possible to identify the authors and original content of many of the primary sources. There is often a discernible difference in style between a Joseph Smith holograph, his dictated compositions, and the writing of the scribes; but, as in the case of most ghostwriting, it is very difficult to determine in a definitive or comprehensive way just what was contributed by Joseph Smith and what was the input of his scribes. Handwriting analysis, historical circumstantial evidence, comparisons of style, identification of original sources, and such new techniques as computer “wordprints” are all promising tools for the further identification of documents that reflect the Prophet’s personal thought, vocabulary, style, and personality. It could be argued that the history is reliable regardless of its authorship, but this in no way justifies representing quotations from its contents as the personal compositions of the Prophet, when they are actually the work of other men.