

# Guest Editor's Prologue

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The response to the "Mormon Origins" and the "Coming of the Book of Mormon" projects which *BYU Studies* embodied in its Spring 1969 and 1970 issues has been more than generous. From one historian has come praise for the "candor, objectivity, and poise" that characterize "the new Mormon history" of which these studies are a part. From others there has been a stream of suggestions and leads on related topics. And from still others the response has been more in the vein of gratitude for the intensifying of a sense of heritage and religious consciousness. The demand for an annual issue to present further findings has been encouraging.

Moving in geographic and chronological sequence, the Institute of Mormon Studies is now involved in a two-year effort to deepen and broaden our sources on the Ohio period of Church history. Some twenty scholars are presently at work on the period, and this volume presents about half of the significant product.

Artifacts and photographs are again part of the format. Among these is the discovery by Dr. James R. Harris of a holograph letter from the Prophet Joseph Smith to his wife, Emma, written in mid-1832, haunting in its direct style and the inward stresses it reveals.

In a similar vein, three of the articles are essential to closer understanding of the intellect and spirit of Joseph Smith: Earl Olson's, Robert Matthews', and Hugh Nibley's.

Earl Olson has studied and carefully classified the order and locus of the revelations recorded during the Church's stay

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in Ohio. Since nearly half of the published *Doctrine and Covenants* originated there, the tools Olson's article provides will facilitate more specialized work both on the text and the context of the Prophet's work.

Robert Matthews, who has been studying the Inspired Revision of the Scriptures for nearly twenty-five years, and has merited the trust of Utah historians no less than those of the Reorganization, presents what is sometimes ignored or forgotten, the evidence that the Prophet was himself learning and growing as he proceeded to translate and revise. A unifying insight results: that his revelations and his Biblical translations are interrelated and that he intended to do more. All of which one would expect of a Prophet committed to continual revelation.

Hugh Nibley shows us the Prophet and his companions freely speculating and disagreeing as they try one approach after another to the Egyptian papyri that nobody on earth could read. As the brethren broke with the Prophet the various projects were dropped, but they mark the first milestone in a path of serious study which LDS scholars will sooner or later be obliged to continue.

Other avenues are also explored. Robert Layton's approach to "environmental perception" shows in a geographer's terms the threads that connected the motives and patterns of situational meanings when New Yorkers became Ohioans and Ohioans moved west. His research has continued, and will culminate in a book-atlas tracing the impact of environmental conditions on the minds and hearts of the early saints.

Kirtland was both the target and the departure point for heightened missionary effort. Richard Lloyd Anderson deals predominantly with the one theme, Davis Bitton with the other. Dr. Anderson gives us a close-up of the first impact of the message of Mormonism in Kirtland, the building blocks that made possible the later expansion. Dr. Bitton singles out the most salient qualities of the effort and the most vital roles Kirtland played in nourishing it. Bitton generalizes the events, Anderson brings us in touch with the personalities, especially with the conversion-prototypes of Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, Levi Hancock, and John Murdock.

Central to the whole historical enterprise—a theme that has "needed doing" for decades—is Dean Jessee's study. His mastery of styles of handwriting, constant exposure to early origin-

al documents, and familiarity with the Prophet's activities, especially in dictating his recollections and current detail, help to make his article indispensable. Here is what, to this date, is the most helpful disentangling of the threads that compose the manuscript history or documentary history of the Church.

Chad Flake, special collections sleuth at BYU, presents an important bibliographic footnote on the newly-acquired Newell K. Whitney collection.

Stanley B. Kimball, well-known to historiographers for his index of bibliographical sources for the Nauvoo era, has now done the same for the Ohio period (focusing on sources east of the Mississippi). Among the "finds" that are far-reaching is the original ledger book of the Kirtland Safety Society. Its absence has led to conclusions which will now need revision. Papers on this are underway for the Summer 1972 issue of *Studies*.

We continue to welcome inquiries, suggestions, and research aid from laymen and specialists alike.