



Joseph Smith, artist unknown, circa 1842. Courtesy Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence, Missouri.

Introduction

Joseph Smith lived a remarkable life. His experiences were expansive, as evidenced in this chronology that introduces readers to the energetic pace and broad scope of concerns that characterized his daily activities. His endeavors ranged from the normal and mundane to the unpredictable and sublime.

This chronology sheds light on the Prophet in the following areas: personal life, visions and revelations, writings, ecclesiastical duties, legal events, travels, and political events. Seeing his life as a single sequence helps readers to place the events of his life in context and to uncover various connections and patterns.

This chronology lists events that can be tied to specific days or weeks. Of course, other events could be added, including many that cannot be tied down to specific dates. Each entry contains a brief summary along with references for further information. These sources are historical documents, most of which have been published, though a few reside only in archives.

A close examination of this chronology yields interesting insights. For example, on December 25, 1832, Joseph Smith received a revelation (D&C 87) containing prophecies about wars, most notably the forthcoming American Civil War. Only three days later, the revelation known as the “Olive Leaf” (portions of D&C 88) was received, containing “the Lord’s message of peace to us.” On June 29, 1840, William W. Phelps wrote a letter to the Prophet, admitting the wrongs

he had committed against him and asking for his forgiveness. Less than two weeks later, on July 11, Joseph Smith gave instructions to the high council about how to conduct disciplinary councils. Even if a cause-and-effect relationship cannot always be established between such events, these juxtapositions and continuities are revealing.

The color-coding in this chronology helps categorize the Prophet's activities and shows trends during these years. For example, in 1834 travel dominated Joseph's life, as he was involved with Zion's Camp; in 1835, entries related to ecclesiastical duties and writing activities occupied his life. In other years, such as 1842, his life was filled with a balance of activities from his many responsibilities. To see these trends in the color-coded categories presents a picture that mere words cannot convey.

The outside margins of this chronology contain information to help place the Prophet in his era. Some of these entries list his contemporaries, including several prominent politicians (Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson), notable writers (Victor Hugo, Edgar Allan Poe), composers (Ludwig van Beethoven, Johann Strauss), artists (Carl Heinrich Bloch, George Catlin), scientists (Charles Darwin, James Joule), and philosophers (Georg Hegel, William James). Other entries highlight inventions from the early nineteenth century (the lawnmower was patented in 1830 and the ice cream freezer in 1843). These innovations had their beginnings in Joseph Smith's time. Still other entries note nineteenth-century historical events, such as the deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphs using the Rosetta Stone in 1822, the incorporation of the city of Chicago in 1837 (three years before the incorporation of Nauvoo), or the forced relocation of the Cherokees on the Trail of Tears beginning in May 1838 (just months before Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs issued the Extermination Order to remove the Mormons from Missouri). Though much of this supplemental information can be found in history books and on the Internet, Chad M. Orton and William W. Slaughter have published a readily accessible and highly

recommended study of Joseph Smith's era that discusses many topics such as these.¹

As extensive as this chronology already is, it is still a work in progress. A few dates and locations differ from what has been published in traditional histories because we have relied on primary sources for such information. Moreover, dozens of scholars are busily researching the Prophet's life in connection with the Joseph Smith Papers Project. The series seeks to compile, annotate, and publish all known documents the Prophet wrote, dictated, or signed his name to. This research has located new documents and has added to our understanding of Church history. As further work is done, perhaps scholars will be able to pinpoint the dates of many other events in Joseph's life for which reliable information is lacking today.

An earlier version of this Joseph Smith chronology was published at josephsmith.byu.edu in connection with the celebration of his bicentennial in 2005. On that website, still available, readers can search entries by day, month, and year. Also, visitors may elect to receive daily emails showing Joseph Smith's activities for that day.

This issue of *BYU Studies* contains an updated and enhanced version of the online chronology. For example, a sampling of the Prophet's many legal encounters has been added, stemming from the recent research by the editors of the forthcoming legal volumes in the Joseph Smith Papers—Gordon A. Madsen, Jeffrey N. Walker, John W. Welch, Morris A. Thurston, and Joseph I. Bentley. We express appreciation also to the Joseph Smith Papers Project, Dean C. Jessee, Larry C. Porter, Scott H. Faulring, Kelsey Draper Lambert, Alex Smith, Joseph Darowski, Kay Darowski, and many staff members at BYU Studies for their work on this chronology.

1. Chad M. Orton and William W. Slaughter, *Joseph Smith's America: His Life and Times* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005).