

The Historians' Corner

Edited by Ronald W. Walker

One of the purposes of the “Historians’ Corner” is to remind the everyday reader of the value of documentary data. For instance, a trained professional might find within the run-of-the-mill document a single word, phrase, or paragraph that re-creates an era as effectively as a stylist’s vignette. Or perhaps he or she will spot within the tangle of ordinary concerns a biographically revealing incident. Even a document’s tone or rhythm can be important. All that is needed is the sensitive eye to find matter and call it to our attention.

Neither of the letters that we present in this “Historians’ Corner” is ordinary or run-of-the-mill. Both contain new data and shed light on the era producing them. But in each case, the careful commentary of a sensitive historian greatly increases our understanding.

The first is presented by Dr. Everett L. Cooley, a seasoned historian who now serves as collections specialist at the University of Utah Marriott Library. Dr. Cooley provides a Brigham Young holograph which speaks of Utah conditions during the 1850s. Perhaps as significant is the letter’s nonchalant call of Elder George Q. Cannon to the Quorum of the Twelve, which tells a great deal about President Young’s manner and times.

Equally interesting is Dr. Roger D. Launius’s “Joseph Smith III and the Kirtland Temple Suit.” Dr. Launius, who is chief of the Office of History at the United States Air Logistics Center at Ogden, Utah, presents a letter written by Joseph III, the son of Mormonism’s founding prophet. While its style and tone suggest a great deal about the author and even the decision-making process of the early Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the letter most importantly tells a great deal more about the famous Kirtland Temple suit.

Both authors reveal that much is yet to be learned about long-established Mormon issues and eras. Truly, the old historical “trees” of the Mormon forest continue to bear fruit.