

Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, editors. *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831.*

Vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow. Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2013.

Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, editors. *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833.*

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Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, editors.

Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834.

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Reviewed by James B. Allen

Beginning in the year 2008, the Church Historian's Press has published a dozen volumes in the *Joseph Smith Papers* series. As explained on the *Papers* website (www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/about-the-project), this highly important and long-awaited project eventually will publish "all known and available documents meeting the project's criteria as Joseph Smith documents. . . . All Joseph Smith documents, even routine ones such as certificates, will be published on this website, and many documents will be published in print volumes. It is expected that roughly two dozen print volumes will be published, at a rate of about two per year." *BYU Studies Quarterly* has reviewed some of those already published, and more reviews are forthcoming.

The published volumes will be divided into six series: Documents; Journals; Histories; Revelations and Translations; Administrative Records; and Legal, Business, and Financial Records. The three volumes reviewed

here begin the *Documents* series, which comprises the core of the entire project. When complete, this series will include all of “Joseph Smith’s outgoing and incoming correspondence, his revelations, reports of discourses, editorials for which he was responsible as editor of a periodical, minutes of meetings in which he played a role, and other ecclesiastical and miscellaneous materials, all arranged chronologically” (1:xxi). The printed volumes include only representative samples of routine documents such as licenses, certificates, bank notes, and other miscellaneous items, but images of all the extant documents will be found online.

These volumes do not lend themselves to casual reading. Rather, they help provide the documentary underpinnings for historians and other scholars to do their work. However, others who are seriously interested in early Mormon history should find them fascinating. Here they will discover the earliest extant transcripts of Joseph Smith’s revelations, as well as hundreds of other Joseph Smith documents, whether they are in the library of the Church Historical Department, in other libraries, or in private hands, with no need to visit those repositories.

Volumes 1–3 cover the period from July 1828 through March 1834. This was the formative period of Mormon history during which the Book of Mormon was translated and published, the Church was organized, Church headquarters was established in Kirtland, the Saints settled in Missouri, Church organization was enhanced, considerable doctrinal development occurred, bitter persecution commenced both in Ohio and Missouri, and Church record keeping began.

These volumes continue the superb editorial work that researchers have come to expect in the Joseph Smith Papers Project. The documents are organized chronologically into sections, each representing a historically significant time period and introduced by a short historical essay. Each document is introduced by a source note giving information about the physical aspects of the document itself: its appearance, its current location, its provenance, and whose handwriting it contains. Joseph Smith’s handwriting practically never appears, but when it does, it is identified in the text with bold type. The source note is followed by a careful historical introduction that some readers may consider the most important or, at least, the most informative part of the whole publication. Here the editors place the document in its historical setting and provide valuable information about the various issues approached in the text. Since all the documents are in chronological order, simply reading the historical introductions provides an insightful overview of some aspects of Church history.

In addition, the documents are meticulously annotated, often with additional historical information that greatly enhances the reader's understanding. This additional information is especially valuable with respect to the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants (which account for a major portion of these three volumes).

Most who study these volumes will want to compare the revelation transcripts with the Doctrine and Covenants. Such comparisons will, of course, reveal a variety of differences. These early handwritten documents contain little punctuation, spelling and capitalization are often different, and there is no division into verses. There are other differences, sometimes related simply to human error in either dictating or recording revelations. Clearly, however, the Saints themselves realized the need for revision. In the minutes of one conference, for example, it shows that it was "Resolved . . . that Br Joseph Smith Jr correct those errors or mistakes which he may discover by the holy Spirit while ~~receiving the~~ ~~revelations~~ reviewing reviewing the revelations & commandments & also the fulness of the scriptures" (2:123).

Some changes are accounted for by the fact that the original revelation was amended at a later date. With respect to section 20, for example, the earliest document does not include what are now verses 65–67 (1:116–26). These verses mention bishops, high priests, and high councilors, none of which existed in the Church when the revelation was initially recorded. There is some evidence, the editors suggest, that it was the intent to continue updating this revelation, known as the "articles and covenants of the Church of Christ" (1:117). Interestingly enough, Oliver Cowdery wrote a similar document, as early as June 1829, in response to an earlier revelation (1:368–74).

A look at the first and last documents in the volumes reviewed here provides further interesting examples of how all the documents are treated.

Volume 1 begins with a transcript of the revelation that eventually became section 3 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which rebukes Joseph Smith for allowing Martin Harris to take the Book of Mormon manuscript so far translated to show his wife. The historical introduction sets it in context and rounds out the story by telling what happened both before and after the revelation, including Joseph Smith's tremendous sorrow and uncontrollable weeping after he discovered the manuscript was lost. How or when the revelation was committed to paper is unknown, but the editors speculate that originally Joseph may have dictated it either to Emma or her brother Reuben Hale. Whatever the

case, the source note reveals that the earliest extant version is in the handwriting of John Whitmer and was entered into Revelation Book 1 around March 1831. The document includes a heading not included in the Doctrine and Covenants, and a footnote indicates that Whitmer created the heading when he copied the text into the book. The first part of the text reads as follows:

July one Thousand Eight hundred & Twenty Eight Given to Joseph Smith the Seer after he had lost certain writings he had Translated by the gift & Power of God

Saying the words <works> of & designs & the Purposes of God can-
not be frustrated . . . (1:116–26)

The strikeout indicates what was struck out in the text, and the brackets indicate insertions. As finally recorded in the Doctrine and Covenants, the revelation begins: “The works, and the designs, and the purposes of God cannot be frustrated” (D&C 3:1).

Volume 3 concludes with a long letter written to Edward Partridge and others by Oliver Cowdery, dated March 30, 1834. Cowdery wrote the letter two days after Joseph Smith’s return to Kirtland; the Prophet had been recruiting individuals to go to Missouri with the Camp of Israel (that is, Zion’s Camp) to help the persecuted Saints there. Upon his return, he found several letters from Church leaders in Missouri. They included criticism of Joseph and other Kirtland leaders, partly because of mistakes made in a published version of a December 1831 revelation, and partly because of the lack of financial support from Kirtland. In the letter, Joseph expressed his frustration over the complaints but also his desire to forgive for the sake of unity. Among other things, the letter provides insight into problems, both internal and external, in both Kirtland and Missouri, and comments on the expected expedition to Missouri and the difficulty of obtaining support for it. The original letter is not extant, but this transcription comes from a copy in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock located in the Oliver Cowdery letter book in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. The editors provide forty-five informative footnotes that either lead us to other sources or explain certain parts in the letter.

Another interesting example of the painstaking editorial work in these three volumes involves one of the most well-known and oft-quoted revelations, section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants, originally titled “The Vision.” Here Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon beheld the Savior and received considerable new doctrinal knowledge concerning

the nature of salvation (2:179–92). Through the introductory material readers learn something about how the revelation was received, which was never described by either Joseph or Sidney but was later recounted by Philo Dibble, who was there at the time. According to Dibble, Joseph, Sidney, and twelve other men were in the upstairs room of the John Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio, when the revelation came. By turns, either Joseph or Sidney would say, “What do I see,” relate what he saw, and then the other would say, “I see the same.” “Not a sound nor motion was made by anyone,” said Dibble, and neither Joseph nor Sidney “moved a joint or limb during the time I was there” (2:182). It is unknown how or when the revelation was written down, but the version transcribed here was copied into Revelation Book 2 sometime between February 16 and March 8, 1832. It is mostly in the handwriting of Frederick G. Williams, except that what are now verses 6 and 7 were written by Joseph Smith. In the text, sixty-seven footnotes provide considerable interesting information and cross-referencing.

The Documents series in the *Joseph Smith Papers* online includes some 1,600 documents, all of which will eventually be published, making this “the most extensive series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, with a breadth of coverage unequaled in any other component of the *Papers*” (1:xxi). In addition, the website provides a photograph of each document as well as a tool for searching within the documents. The three volumes reviewed here include 266 documents.

All the revelations included in the Documents series are also included in the Revelations and Translations series. The difference is that the Documents series presents the earliest extant text of each revelation and provides extensive information about the historical setting but no textual analysis, while the Revelations and Translations series provides in-depth textual analysis that notes all changes made in the text as it developed. There are numerous such changes, some of them significant. In section 28, for example, it is said in verse 9 that the city of Zion shall be located “on the borders by the Lamanites” but in the earliest extant transcription this was recorded as “among the Lamanites” (1:186).

In many cases these volumes provide some details about the nature of Joseph Smith’s revelations that are not apparent in the Doctrine and Covenants and that most Mormon historians may not be aware of. Section 42 is one example. The introduction to this section tells that the revelation was given through Joseph Smith on February 9, 1831, and that the Prophet said it embraced “the law of the Church.” However, in volume 1 we learn that verses 1–72 of the revelation were initially a compilation

of five separate “commandments,” each given in response to a particular question. Assembled elders asked the questions and Joseph Smith dictated the answers. Curiously, the answers to the last two questions are not included in the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Verses 74–93 were the result of three more questions asked on February 23, to which Joseph Smith gave responses. The editors hypothesize “that ‘the Law’ was a working document, meant to be revised or expanded as new circumstances raised new questions” (1:247). The answer to the first of the February 12 questions, which had to do with sending elders to the west, is not in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, while the last part of the transcript is now verses 74–77.

Another example of how these volumes teach us things that are not immediately apparent in the *Doctrine and Covenants* has to do with section 82. Verse 1 says the following: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, my servants, that inasmuch as you have forgiven one another your trespasses, even so I, the Lord, forgive you.” The discussion in volume 2 clarifies what this refers to. Preceding the text of the revelation is the text of the minutes of meetings held on April 26 and 27, 1832, which says that in the first meeting “all differences settled & the hearts of all run together in love” (2:232). In a footnote to the minutes and in the discussion of the revelation, the editors inform us that the references to settling differences and forgiving each other concern a disagreement between Edward Partridge and Sidney Rigdon that was settled amicably during a break in the meeting.

In addition to the revelation manuscripts, these volumes include many other documents of interest. The following is a list of a few examples: a January 16, 1830, agreement between Joseph Smith and Martin Harris authorizing Harris to sell copies of the *Book of Mormon* until he collected enough money to repay him for the cost of printing (1:108); the November 2, 1831, “Testimony of the Witnesses to the Book of the Lords commandments,” signed by eighteen men and bearing witness of the truth of the revelations soon to be published (2:110–114); minutes of several significant conferences at which Joseph Smith presided or participated; a January 28, 1832, letter from Oliver Cowdery giving Joseph Smith information about the welfare of the Missouri Saints (2:163); two letters from Joseph to Emma Smith (2:246, 304); the tremendously important 1832 document that was Joseph Smith’s first attempt to write his own history and contained a most significant early account of his First Vision (2:275); a deed transferring ownership of Joseph and Emma Smith’s farm in Harmony, Pennsylvania, to Joseph McKune Jr. (3:158); a proposal by

Edward Partridge for Zion's City Center (3:308); and a warrant, issued October 21, 1833, warning several Saints, including Joseph Smith and his family, to leave the Kirtland township immediately (3:325).

Each volume includes a section at the end called "Reference Material," a kind of capstone that helps make this series an essential research tool for scholars. In volumes 1 and 2, this material begins with a "Calendar of Documents" that lists chronologically all known Joseph Smith documents, including various versions, created in the period covered in that volume, identifying authors, genre, places of creation, and other important information. It includes nonextant versions and even, in the case of volume 1, some Mark Hofmann forgeries (identified as such, of course). There is no explanation as to why such a calendar is not included in volume 3. Next in each volume is a section titled "Source Notes for Multiple-Entry Documents." This is an effort to save space by providing a source note for a source from which several entries in the book were drawn. For example, *The Evening and the Morning Star* is the source for nine documents in volume 3, but rather than providing a long source note for each of those entries, the editors provide a reference to the multiple-entry note. Next comes a detailed chronology for the years covered by the volume. This is followed by a "Geographical Directory" that describes most places mentioned in the volume, including waterways, followed by a series of maps. Each volume then provides a Joseph Smith pedigree chart and a very helpful "Biographical Directory" listing most of the persons mentioned in that volume. Volumes 1 and 2 also include short sections dealing with ecclesiastical organization as well as a glossary of terms that have particular meaning in Mormon usage. Each volume also provides an essay on sources, a bibliography of works cited and, finally, a chart listing the various sections of the Doctrine and Covenants and their corresponding section numbers in key editions: 1833, 1835, 1844, the modern LDS edition (listed as 1981 in volumes 1 and 2 and as 2013 in volume 3), and the Community of Christ's 2004 edition. The listing includes only those items written before the death of Joseph Smith.

In perusing these volumes, I am struck once again by how much Joseph Smith accomplished in his lifetime, the myriad things he was involved in as he struggled to build God's kingdom on earth, his devotion to the importance of keeping records, and the tremendous problems he faced. I also feel his spirit as he expressed anguish over the persecution of the Saints, his appreciation for and confidence in those closest to him, his sorrow over his own weaknesses, his distress over the degraded state of the world as he saw it, and his concern for the

well-being of his wife Emma. One passage in a letter to Emma dated October 13, 1832, reveals something of his apocalyptic outlook as he reported his impression of the people of New York:

Their iniquities shall <be> visited upon their heads and their works shall be burned up with unquenchable fire the inequity [iniquity] of the people is printed in every countenance and nothing but the dress of the people makes them look fair and butiful all is deformity there is something in every countenance that is disagreeable with few exceptions Oh how long Oh Lord Shall this order of things exist and darkness cover the Earth and gross darkness cover the people.

Another passage in the same letter reveals his concern for Emma as she struggled with certain problems while he was gone from Kirtland:

I pray to God to soften the hearts of those arou[n]d you to be kind to you and take <the> burden of[f] your shoulders as much as possible and not afflict you I feel for you for I know your state and that others do not but you must comfort yourself knowing that God is your friend in heaven and that you have one true and living friend on Earth your Husband Joseph Smith Jr.

He added a P.S. and signed it “I remain your affectionate Husband until Death Joseph Smith Junior” (2:307–13).

I am taken with the excellent editorial work in these volumes, and I find no real weakness. I could quibble and call for more extensive historical information and for some textual analysis, but these additions would only make the already huge volumes larger and are not really suited to the editors’ purposes. The historical essays are very adequate, and the textual analysis is taken care of in the *Revelations and Translations* series. Nothing is perfect, but I find nothing in these volumes that deserves criticism.

Joseph Smith’s *History of the Church*, edited by B. H. Roberts and first published over a century ago, was a remarkable achievement for its time and is still the documentary source most often cited in historical writings about the Church’s founding era. However, with the continuing publication of the *Joseph Smith Papers*, that should change. When this multivolume, multiseries project is complete, scholars interested in this era will be sadly amiss if they do not consult and cite it often. The continuing appeal of Roberts’s work is its first-person narrative format that is easily followed by the casual reader. Its major disadvantages, so far as professional historians are concerned, are twofold: (1) it was drawn from a variety of sources, and since it is not clear what those sources were, it is also

unclear what is actually Joseph Smith's work and what came from other sources; and (2) the text itself was edited, so we do not know exactly what the original source said. Clearly this confusion is being avoided in the Joseph Smith Papers Project, which makes these volumes an absolutely essential resource for those who want to explore the life of Mormonism's founding prophet in detail. We eagerly look forward to all future volumes of the Documents series, which is the core of the project.

James B. Allen is Professor of History Emeritus at Brigham Young University, former assistant Church historian, and a former senior research fellow at the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History. His many publications include his reviews of the Joseph Smith Papers—*Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, found in *BYU Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009): 152–61; and *Histories, Volumes 1–2*, found in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2015): 171–89—as well as *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography* (with Ronald W. Walker and David J. Whittaker, University of Illinois Press, 2000). *Studies in Mormon History* took over sixteen years to compile and was heralded at publication as the most valuable bibliography yet for students of LDS History. The bibliography continues to be updated, which is now online at <http://mormonhistory.byu.edu>.