

New Data for Revising the Missouri “Documentary History”

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The informed student of Joseph Smith would not trade his seven volume “Documentary History of the Church” for all other books, since it attempts to furnish the main chronological sources on the rise of the Latter-day Saints.¹ It is a tribute to its indispensability to insist now that it needs careful annotation and moderate expansion, a project not yet in any serious planning stage. That particular part under consideration here contains a narrative of Joseph Smith’s arrival in Missouri in 1831 and what appears to be the first Mormon reaction to their chosen land.² Yet a close look at this short account illustrates the need of adding later-discovered documents, as well as properly understanding those already printed in the volumes. Each source is a building block with its own genealogy, and one fails to understand the record without knowing the processes that formed it. The *History of the Church* basically records Joseph Smith’s revelations and directions to the Church, as well as an administrative history of his presidency. Out of voluminous possibilities, then, new material selected should follow the standard of illuminating these revelations or the Prophet’s life, particularly his role as church leader.

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¹“Documentary History of the Church” has been a widely used nickname for the work begun by Joseph Smith and first printed in the *Times and Seasons*, 1842-46 as the “History of Joseph Smith,” then reprinted and continued later in the *Deseret News* and *LDS Millennial Star*. The bound edition was edited by B. H. Roberts as the *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1902-1932). Abbreviated as *HC* in this article, the bound edition will be cited unless textual problems dictate earlier reference.

²*HC* 1:188-99. This short article suggests representative corrections within these pages. Treatment of the Colesville Branch in Missouri is not attempted, the focus being on enrichment of the journey to Zion and certain commands given in D&C 58 after arriving, including problems raised by descriptions of Missouri.

One important source is contemporary newspapers. In June 1831 several revelations commanded the Prophet and over two dozen missionaries to leave Ohio, preach on the way, and meet in conference "to rejoice upon the land of Missouri, which is the land of your inheritance" (D&C 52:42). Movements at Church headquarters in Kirtland were quite closely followed by the nearby *Painesville Telegraph*, which sarcastically suggests the date of departure with its comments on 14 June 1831: "The chosen few are to be off during the present week, going in pairs in different routes, all on foot, except Jo, Rigdon, and Harris, the contrivers and commanders of the expedition." Since this newspaper regularly ran its brand of commentary on Mormon events, several of its articles have good relevance for an expanded history. Sometimes even Mormon newspapers have been overlooked. For instance, the 1831 Missouri trip in the *HC* rather mechanically recites places and distances, but in 1835 in the *Messenger and Advocate*, Joseph Smith spiritedly discusses his first Missouri trip in simple prose worthy to add to the "Documentary History":

I have been laboring in this cause for eight years, during which time I have travelled much, and have had much experience. I removed from Seneca County, N.Y., to Geauga County, Ohio, in February, 1831. Having received, by an heavenly vision, a commandment in June following, to take my journey to the western boundaries of the State of Missouri, and there designate the very spot, which was to be the central spot for the commencement of the gathering together of those who embrace the fulness of the everlasting gospel—I accordingly undertook the journey with certain ones of my brethren, and after a long and tedious journey, suffering many privations and hardships, I arrived in Jackson County, Missouri. And after viewing the country, seeking diligently at the hand of God, he manifested himself unto me and designated to me and others the very spot upon which he designed to commence the work of the gathering and the upbuilding of an holy city, which should be called Zion: Zion because it is to be a place of righteousness, and all who build thereon are to worship the true and living God—and all believe in one doctrine, even the doctrine of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.³

What about contemporary letters and Mormon journals? Though there are few for this period, letters sometimes equal

³"To the elders of the church of Latter Day Saints," *LDS Messenger and Advocate*, 1 (September 1835):179. Compare the much terser summary in *HC* 1:188. Here and in other quotes of the article, moderate punctuation and capitalization revision is made for clarity.

the quality of a good journal in narration and emotional impact. One such letter was written by William E. McLellin to his non-Mormon relatives, warmly but carefully recounting his conversion the year before, which began when two different sets of the elders travelling to Zion in 1831 preached in his village of Paris, Illinois. The first pair held an evening meeting and described in detail the discovery, plates, and contents of the Book of Mormon. They left the next morning. McLellin's next exposure to the new religion is relived in this letter:

But in a few days two others came into the neighbourhood proclaiming that these were the last days, and that God had sent forth the Book of Mormon to show the times of the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, when the Saviour shall come to destroy iniquity off the face of the earth and *reign* with his saints in *Millennial Rest*. One of these was a witness to the book and had seen an angel, which declared its truth. His name was David Whitmer. They were in the neighbourhood about a week. I talked much with them by way of enquiry and argument. They believed Joseph Smith to be an inspired prophet. They told me that he and between 20 & thirty [of] their preachers were on their way to Independence. My curiosity was roused up and my anxiety also to know the truth.⁴

Several personal diaries of the missionaries then sent have survived, precious records not merely of locations and distances, but of the fervent spirit that marked the success of the new movement. In a new "Documentary History," some selections from these should record the carrying out of the missions assigned in printed revelations.

Since missionary pairs travelled separate routes, comments of Joseph Smith's party would have special significance. Of the half-dozen men travelling with him, only William W. Phelps now offers additional details of the journey. *HC* gives but an outline of Joseph Smith's first trip to Missouri, with the date of departure 19 June:

We went by wagon, canal boats, and stages to Cincinnati. . . . We left Cincinnati in a steamer, and landed at Louisville, Ky., where we were detained three days in waiting for a steamer to convey us to St. Louis. At St. Louis, myself,

⁴Wm. E. and Emiline McLellin to Samuel McLellin, Independence [Missouri], Aug. 4, 1832. The surname follows William's later spelling in the article. I have edited certain capitalization and punctuation in this extract retaining McLellin's underlining. Letter copied courtesy of RLDS Historian, Richard P. Howard.

Brothers Harris, Phelps, Partridge and Coe, went by land on foot to Independence, Jackson county, Missouri, where we arrived about the middle of July.⁵

Is this the "long and tedious journey" with "many privations and hardships" that the Prophet referred to in 1835? A full month and 900 miles in three sentences? Phelps was a journalist and caught the color of that journey in a letter not heretofore available in Mormon publications. He had been baptized before leaving Ohio with Joseph Smith, arriving there from Canandaigua, New York, where he had edited *The Ontario Phoenix*, an anti-Masonic paper, for two years.⁶ One week after arriving in Independence, he sketched for *The Phoenix* the trip from western New York to Cleveland, and from there with the Prophet to Missouri. The newspaper published only an "extract of a letter" describing the trip without a hint of Mormonism, the editor undoubtedly deleting anything that would link the paper with the scorned religion. Nevertheless the details of the trip west were interesting to its first readers, and give a good insight into the Prophet's experiences and feelings as he first journeyed to Missouri. This is the first portion of that extract, pertaining to travel:

After I left Canandaigua, on the 9th of June, I went on board a canal-boat the same evening for Buffalo, where I arrived the 12th. Started for Cleveland on the 18th. Passed from thence to Newark, 176 miles on the Ohio canal; found it superior to the Erie canal in point of better locks, and wider excavation. From thence to Dayton, 101 miles. I passed through Columbus, the capital of the state, an ordinary town about as large as Geneva; and from thence to Cincinnati, 65 miles by water on the Miami Canal. Cincinnati is a thriving place, as large as Albany, but not so handsome. Took steamboat for Louisville, 165 miles (deck passage) and was roused in the night by the cry of wood! wood!—the common practice among southern boats to replenish the stock of fuel. Arrived at Louisville on the 25th. This is a considerable southern city, with daily newspapers, hacks, and draymen (cartmen) thick as southern mosquitoes; passed down 1½ miles to Shippingport (or Shavingport), and tarried three days in wait for a passage to St. Louis. Viewed the Grand Canal round the falls of Ohio—a magnificent

⁵HC 1:188. I have omitted the confrontation with Reverend Walter Scott at Cincinnati, the only incident narrated on the trip.

⁶For a summary of Phelps' career and conversion to Mormonism, see Walter Dean Bowen, "The Versatile W. W. Phelps" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1958), pp. 16-28.

display of human skill, which cost \$900,000. Three superb locks of hewn stone, the largest of which, for high water, is 60 feet wide, 43 feet deep, and 300 feet long. Saw the Franklin, a boat of the largest size, mount through in a kind of "dreadful splendor." On the 27th, left for St. Louis in the steamboat, Don Juan. On the 29th I passed the mouth of the Ohio, where three states were in sight, in the 37th degree of north latitude, and the sun nearly over head. 30th saw mills on the Mississippi propelled by current wheels: constructed like cidemill screws, 100 feet long; halted at Cape Girardeau, and saw Frenchmen using oxen to draw by the horns; lead piled up like cord wood; broke the boat wheels on Devil Island. July 1st, stopped at Genevieve, saw large quantities of lead and white sand. Arrived at St. Louis same day, and quite a city, with the small pox in it. July 2d started for the west part of Missouri, and saw in the first graveyard Roman Catholic crosses sprawled over the dead. From this time until the 14th, I passed through patches of timber, and fields of prairies, till I arrived at Independence, 12 miles from the west line of the United States, containing the last, or outside post-office.

The heavy sounding boat-horns, used by the stagedrivers in Ohio, with the common term "smart," applied to everything—as a *smart* man, *smart* land, *smart* rain, etc. was nothing compared to the customs below Louisville. Men go armed with a pocket dirk, or pistol; a sixpence is called a "*piccaoon*"; a schilling a "*bit*," and the word "mighty" is an indefinite adjective and qualifies all things, good, bad and indifferent—as a mighty man, mighty land, mighty big, mighty little, mighty much, etc.

The Ohio, opposite Indiana and Illinois, is a beautiful sheet of water, quite clear, and studded with cotton wood, sycamore, locust, etc., and streaked with steamboats from one end to the other. The Mississippi is a serpentine stream, rily below St. Louis; guarded on the west, or Missouri shore, by huge bluffs, capt ever and anon with daring shot towers. It is said to be clear above the Missouri. The Mississippi is the grand middle feeder of the Atlantic Ocean, and already steams and smokes with the commerce of nine states. The Missouri is the capsheaf—it is always rily and bubbly, and receives its "mountain rise" the last of June. It is said to possess mineral qualities, among which is magnesia. An uncommon heavy shower on the night of the 4th of July raised the stream in 24 hours, 8 feet!⁷

⁷*Ontario Phoenix*, 7 September 1831, headed "Extract of a Letter from the late Editor of this paper, dated STATE OF MISSOURI, INDEPENDENCE, JACKSON CO. July 23, 1831." The second half of the letter appears later in this article without intervening deletion. The letter terminates, "I am, W. W. PHELPS." I am grateful to Ontario County Historian Clyde Maffin for procuring a photograph of the article. Spelling corrections in reprinting the letter are limited to the newspaper's "musketoos," "Cape Gerardeau," and "indifinite."

The first Missouri conferences and dedication ceremonies cannot be treated here, though examples can be given from two important supplementary records. The *HC* has a bare entry for 4 August as the day of "the first conference in the land of Zion," held at the home of Joshua Lewis with attendance of the Colesville branch. What went on? Only a summary statement suggests: "The spirit of the Lord was there."⁸ But one can attend the conference to some extent through the minute book of the period, called the *Far West Record*. It gives the names of fourteen elders present at this 4 August conference, indicating also that thirty-one additional members "with the elders partook of the sacrament." Sidney Rigdon's charge is given in summary, together with "exhortation by Brother Joseph Smith, Jr., to acts of righteousness and keeping the commandments of the Lord with promise of blessings."⁹ Since such moral leadership in the new Zion has obvious importance, these early minutes should be included in a revised "Documentary History." Though not utilized in detail in the *HC*, certain other meetings were annotated from that book by B. H. Roberts; but a higher quality history demands greater use of the first conference record of the Church.¹⁰

Another official source was not available in the formation of the *HC*. On 8 March 1831, John Whitmer was called "to keep the church record and history continually, for Oliver Cowdery I have appointed to another office."¹¹ Taking his charge seriously, he produced an earlier "Documentary History," building his main work around the revelations and formal correspondence of the Church. But when the present *HC* began in 1839, John Whitmer had been excommunicated, and had kept the original history.¹² In the midst of completing the massive *HC*, historians at Nauvoo received the information from John Whitmer that the early history could "be had at a fair price."¹³ Incensed, church leaders responded through Willard Richards that their work covered the same period and was so voluminous that it duplicated anything Whitmer had previously compiled: "therefore any thing which you have in the shape

⁸*HC* 1:199.

⁹*Far West Record*, typescript, pp. 5-6, Church Historical Department.

¹⁰See, for example, citations of the *Far West Record* in *HC* 1:77, 110, 175.

¹¹D&C 47:3. The last name "Cowdery" was added in later editions.

¹²For a summary, see Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 11 (Summer 1971):439-443, 450-452.

¹³John Whitmer to W. W. Phelps, *Far West* [Missouri], 8 January 1844.

of church history would be of little or no consequence to the church at length.”¹⁴ Even if this curt comment were largely true, there were certain early documents copied by Whitmer that were valuable and not otherwise available. One of these was a first fragment of church history in Missouri produced by Whitmer’s predecessor, Oliver Cowdery. Roberts used part of this account, footnoting the 2 August dedication of the land by Rigdon, but a significant gap remains.¹⁵ The revelation of 1 August instructed Sidney Rigdon also to “consecrate and dedicate . . . the spot of the temple unto the Lord.”¹⁶ Yet this command appears unfulfilled in the *HC*, which only indicates that on 3 August Joseph Smith “proceeded to dedicate the spot for the temple.”¹⁷ But the Cowdery record preserved by Whitmer adds considerable dimension, showing that Joseph Smith indeed laid a cornerstone with prayer, but that Rigdon formally sealed this dedication:

[Eight elders] assembled together where the temple is to be erected. Sidney Rigdon dedicated the ground where the city is to stand, and Joseph Smith, Jr., laid a stone at the northeast corner of the contemplated temple in the name of the Lord Jesus of Nazareth. After all present had rendered thanks to the Great Ruler of the universe, Sidney Rigdon pronounced this spot of ground wholly dedicated unto the Lord forever. Amen.¹⁸

One significant purpose of the *HC* is to be the ultimate commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants, but it badly needs clarification on another of Sidney Rigdon’s assignments. While in Missouri he was instructed:

And I give unto my servant Sidney a commandment that he shall write a description of the land of Zion, and a statement of the will of God as it shall be made known by the Spirit unto him—and an epistle and subscription to be presented unto all the churches to obtain moneys to be put into the hands of the bishop to purchase lands for an inheritance for the children of God.¹⁹

¹⁴Willard Richards to John Whitmer, Nauvoo [Illinois], 23 February 1844. Cited in Journal History of that date; also noted in *HC* 6:224.

¹⁵*HC* 1:196.

¹⁶D&C 58:57. “Of” was changed to “for” in modern editions.

¹⁷*HC* 1:199; also the corrected reading of the manuscript, which originally mentioned only the dedication without naming any person, the form of the first printings before the 1902 bound edition.

¹⁸“The Book of John Whitmer,” ms. at the RLDS Department of History, p. 32. Punctuation in the Whitmer history is mine.

¹⁹Book of Commandments 59:63 (1833). Later editions slightly modify some words of the verse. See D&C 58:50-51.

As a long description of Jackson County appears right after the above revelation in the *HC*, it is easy to assume that Rigdon was its author; especially so when it is prefaced with: "As we had received a commandment for Elder Rigdon to write a description of the land of Zion, we sought for all the information necessary to accomplish so desirable an object." Thus it has been commonly accepted by historians that the present Missouri description of the *HC* is Rigdon's.²⁰ But it is not, for John Whitmer gives "a copy of the epistle written by S. Rigdon's own hand," and it is in language that is not in the present *HC*. But it certainly should be, for on returning to Kirtland, Joseph Smith reiterated the command to raise money for Missouri purchases, appointing Newell Whitney and Oliver Cowdery to the task—and telling Rigdon that his first Missouri description was inadequate: "He exalted himself in his heart and received not counsel . . . wherefore his writing is not acceptable unto the Lord, and he shall make another" (D&C 63:55-56). The Whitmer copy of Rigdon's work is a significant church document, displaying the consciousness of Latter-day mission and the moral commitment to serve Jesus Christ "with fear, rejoicing, and trembling." It might have been printed and circulated but instead was carried among the branches as an introduction to Whitney and Cowdery in their money-raising assignment. The Zion to be purchased was thus described by Rigdon:

This land being situated in the center of the continent on which we dwell, with an exceeding fertile soil and ready cleared for the hand of the cultivator, bespeaks the goodness of our God in providing so goodly a heritage, and its climate suited persons from every quarter of this continent, whether east, west, north or south—yea, I think I may say for all constitutions from every part of the world, and its productions nearly all varieties of both grain and vegetables which are common in this country, together with all means [for] clothing. In addition to this it abounds with fountains of pure water, the soil, climate and surface all adapted to health. Indeed I may say that the whole properties of the country invite the Saints to come and partake their blessings. But what more need I say about a country which our heavenly Father

²⁰This corrects my misreading of *HC* 1:197 in my "Jackson County in Early Mormon Descriptions," *Missouri Historical Review* 65 (April 1971): 284-87. The mistake is quite natural, as witness Alvin R. Dyer, *The Refiner's Fire* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1968), p. 38, and Pearl Wilcox, *The Latter Day Saints on the Missouri Frontier* (Independence, Missouri: [n.p.], 1972), p. 39.

holds in his own hands, for if it were unhealthy he could make it healthy, and if barren he could make it fruitful. Such is the land which God has provided for us in these last days for an inheritance, and truly it is a goodly land and none other so well suited for all the Saints as this and all those who have faith and confidence in God. Who has ever seen this land will bear the same testimony.²¹

When the true Rigdon description of Missouri is identified one would assume that the similar but longer production in the *HC* is Joseph Smith's. But writers who have introduced it with such phrases as "Joseph Smith said" or "the words of Joseph Smith" should be more careful, since it is largely a condensation of William W. Phelps' letter of 1834 describing the counties lying above Jackson County. This can be vividly seen by placing the *HC* account side by side with equivalent extracts from the Phelps' letter:

"History of Joseph Smith"²²

Unlike the timbered states in the east, except upon the rivers and water courses (which were ver-
dantly dotted with trees from one to three miles wide), as far as the eye can glance, the beautiful rolling prairies lay spread around like a sea of meadows.

The timber is a mixture of oak, hickory, black walnut, elm, ash, cherry, honey locust, mulberry, coffee bean, hackberry, box elder and bass wood, together with the addition of cotton

Phelps' 1834 Letter²³

Unlike the martial-like wildernesses of the timbered states, except upon rivers and water courses, which are striped and specked with a rather small than sturdy growth of trees, as far as the eye can glance, swell peeps over swell . . . in the midst of an ocean of meadows.

The timber is mostly a mixture of several kinds of oak, hickory, black walnut, elm, ash, cherry, honey locust, mulberry, coffee bean, hack berry, bass wood, and box elder, with the addition

²¹"The Book of John Whitmer," p. 36.

²²The first printing is quoted because of rewriting explained later. "History of Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, 5 (1 March 1844):450. Since comparison is the purpose of the passage, some portions are deleted as indicated, though no change is made in sequence. Manuscript readings are followed in these cases: adding "ash" between "elm" and "cherry"; "locust"; "hackberry"; "pecan"; "persimmons"; "sixteenth" (a cipher "16" has been misread as "10" in printing); "vanish." I have editorially modified the spelling of "buffaloe" and "plumbs." My punctuation of the opening paragraph is justified by the manuscript.

²³W. W. Phelps to Oliver Cowdery, Esq. (Letter 1), Liberty, Mo., Oct. 20, 1834, *LDS Messenger and Advocate*, 1 (November 1834):22-24. This letter is much longer than the Zion description it is compared to, so only matching extracts are given, some out of sequence. For clarity I have altered the following: "pecon"; "paupau"; and "brandt."

wood, button wood, pecan, soft and hard maple upon the bottoms. The shrubbery was beautiful, and consisted in part of plums, grapes, crab apples, and persimmons. . . .

The wild game is less plenty where man has commenced the cultivation of the soil, than it is a little distance farther in the wild prairies. Buffalo, elk, deer, bear, wolves, beaver, and many lesser animals roam at pleasure. Turkeys, geese, swans, ducks, yea, a variety of the feathered race are among the rich abundance that graces the delightful regions of this goodly land of the heritage of the children of God. Nothing is more fruitful, or a richer stockholder in the blooming prairies, than the honey bee; honey is but about twenty-five cents per gallon.

The season is mild and delightful nearly three-quarters of the year, and as the land of Zion, situated at about equal distances from the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, as well as from the Alleghany and Rocky mountains, in the thirty-ninth degree of north latitude, and between the sixteenth and seventeenth degrees of west longitude, it bids fair to become one of the most blessed places on the globe, when the curse is taken from the land, if not before. . . .

But all these impediments vanish, when it is recollected that the prophets have said concerning Zion in the last days: how the glory of Lebanon is to come upon her; the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of his sanctuary, that he may make the

upon the bottoms of cotton wood, button wood, pecan, soft maple, with now and then a very small patch of sugar maple. The shrubbery, in part, is . . . grapes, papaw, persimon, crab apple, etc.

The wild game is an important link to the living of many in the west. In the inhabited sections, however, it grows "less plenty": and where the hunter could once drop the huge buffalo, the surly bear, the stately elk, the sly beaver, and the proud swan, he can now find difficulty in bringing down the deer, the wolf, the fox, the turkey, the goose, the brant, the duck. . . . The honey bee is a large stockholder in the flowers of the variegated prairies. . . . Honey is frequently sold at 25 cents per whole sale, & 37 cents at retail, a gallon.

The climate is mild and delightful nearly three quarters of the year; and being situated about an equal distance from the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, as well as from Alleghany and Rocky mountains, in near 39 degrees of north latitude, and between 16 and 17 degrees of west longitude, it certainly affords the pleasing hope of becoming as good a spot as there will be on the globe, when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb.

The lacks that seem most prominent will soon sink with the fading glories of perishable things . . . yea, the glory of Lebanon will come upon the land of the Lord, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together to beautify the place of his sanctuary, and make the

place of his feet glorious, where for brass, he will bring gold, and for iron he will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron. And where the feast of fat things will be given to the just; yea, when the splendor of the Lord brought to one consideration, for the good of his people, the calculations of men and the vain glory of the world vanishes. And we exclaim: God will shine—the perfection of beauty out of Zion.

place of his feet glorious. . . . *Then*, the veil spread over all nations will be taken off and the pure in heart see God and his glory. *Then*, for brass the Lord will bring gold, and for iron silver, and for wood brass.

Questions are obviously raised in the above quotation of three-fourths of the *HC* description, but they have reasonable answers. Can the 1834 description of the adjoining counties accurately portray 1830 Jackson County? The time differential is negligible, and even today's tourist can see that county lines do not change the general appearance of this region. Is it appropriate for Joseph Smith's history to copy Phelps' words? Phelps himself was Joseph Smith's historical clerk when this section of the *HC* was compiled about 1842.²¹ He could easily have modified what he had written earlier to suit his recollection of being in Jackson County with Joseph Smith. Can the account be considered the Prophet's? Yes, in the sense that he undoubtedly approved it prior to publication. But since the language is basically Phelps', one cannot press too far a study of the Prophet's thought with this and similar material. The moral is obviously to check each quotation attributed to Joseph Smith. The same thing is true of many busy administrators who employ executive assistants.

With the above understanding, the words of the *HC* introducing the Missouri picture seem more accurate: "As we had received a commandment for Elder Rigdon to write a description . . . we sought for all the information necessary."²⁵ The pronoun "we" could refer to the Prophet and others, or the clerk and others. It is known that Edward Partridge also wrote a description of Zion.²⁶ In addition, Phelps had penned

²¹This is based upon Phelps' handwriting for the *HC* manuscript, which I have checked personally and discussed with Dean Jessee, whose conclusions about Phelps have not changed since "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," pp. 441, 446-47.

²⁵*HC* 1:197.

²⁶Ezra Booth to Mr. Partridge, 20 September 1831, cited in Booth to I. Eddy, no. 7, *The Ohio Star*, 24 November 1831.

similar language on the subject in 1831, though a parenthesis on his words in the *HC* is necessary before quoting this. The compared passage above has been reworked somewhat from the *Times and Seasons* account in the *HC* publication, but not (as has been alleged) on confusing principles. The clumsy first sentence has been broken into workable segments, and topical material (principally on prairies) has been drawn together. The language has also been tightened by eliminating redundancies, especially in the opening paragraph.²⁷ Other than that, the printed account in the *HC* is quite faithful to Phelps' manuscript, which was not followed with perfect accuracy in the first place.²⁸ Other modifications were evidently done by B. H. Roberts in preparation for the printing of the *HC* in 1902. In his other works, Roberts considerably amplified his description of Jackson County from his own experiences in Missouri,²⁹ but in the *HC* he edited the Phelps' account without adding his own impressions. Even in the radically edited first paragraph, Roberts basically employed the language of the *HC* and not his own. A revised "Documentary History" would restore original wording. But Roberts obviously saw his role as editor to improve the clarity of Phelps' phrasing; he did not set out to adulterate history.

At least one present at the 1831 dedications found the promised land far from promising. Ezra Booth, who defected after returning east, contended that his Ohio land was twice as productive as anything he had seen in Missouri.³⁰ Yet Jackson County was seen mostly through the eyes of enthusiastic faith as the elders of the Church gathered there for its consecration in the summer of 1831.

The final section of Phelps' 1831 letter to the *Ontario Phoenix* contains similar optimism, though possessing the his-

²⁷See *HC* 1:197-99. *The Times and Seasons* first printing incorrectly punctuated the opening lines, resulting in an incomplete sentence, which may have motivated rephrasing the beginning.

²⁸In addition to examples given in footnote 22, the *Times and Seasons* made one common error of deleting material between similar words. The manuscript read, "many other common agricultural commodities," but the typesetter apparently looked forward to "commodities" after beginning to set "common," thus eliminating "common agricultural" in the first printing.

²⁹Compare how freely Roberts adapted the Phelps' description when writing on his own responsibility. See *The Missouri Persecutions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1900), pp. 48-50, or *Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930), pp. 259-61.

³⁰Booth to Eddy, no. 5, cited in *Ohio Star*, 10 November 1831.

torical value of particularizing the first Mormon impressions of Western Missouri. Following is the entire remaining section, continuing directly from the portion quoted earlier in this article:

The state of Missouri is *sui generis*—containing two-thirds rolling prairies, and the rest patches of timber. The upland: oak, hickory, walnut, etc.—and the bottoms: bass wood, cotton wood, locust, coffee bean, etc., etc. The soil especially in the western part of the state, and generally upon the prairies, is a rich black mould, bedded on clay, from 3 to 8 feet deep. The prairies are beautiful beyond description, yielding prairie grass, wild sun flowers, small flowers in great variety and color, and continually presenting, or “keeping up appearances” of a highly cultivated country without inhabitants. Meadow peeps o’er meadow, and prairie on prairies rise like the rolling waves on the ocean. Prairie plovers, prairie hens, wild turkies, rabbits, gray squirrels, prairie dogs, wolves, rattlesnakes (the big breed), prairie rattlesnakes, copperheads, panthers, deer, etc., go when they have a mind to and come when they please.

With the exception of some of the western counties, the state is under a remediless want of water and water privileges. Few mills are in the state, except horse ones. At the capital of Montgomery county, there are four little log huts on the summit of a dry prairie; the people live on what little rain water can be saved from the eaves. Education sings small, and few schools are kept, a common occurrence in southern and new states. No danger need be feared from *secret societies*, or any other.

It is a great grazing country on account of the prairie chance; cattle, horses, hogs (which by the bye are long nosed and mean), and sheep raise themselves almost; corn, in good seasons, does well; wheat, tolerable, but nothing like York state. Cotton, sweet potatoes, wild honey, wild grapes, wild roses, strawberries, dew berries, black berries and raspberries are common. The milk on the bottoms is sometimes found to be poison, in which case those using it and the cows die. The consequent diseases are the cold plague in the spring, and the ague and fever in the fall. The cash trade is carried on with Santa Fec, a Spanish port on the Pacific, in 36 degrees north latitude, and about 900 miles distant, across the prairie, where there is not a tree. The fur trade is to the Rocky and Shining Mountains, 800 miles distant, where is said to exist a kind of frog, with hard sharp scales, which he hoists and lowers at pleasure, and when swallowed by a snake *cuts out* in great agony. The weather is warmer than in York state, and when it grows cold at night with the wind from an easterly direction, depend upon a deluging rain before morning, and then it clears off hot enough to roast

eggs. The inhabitants are emigrants from Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and the Carolinas, etc., with customs, manners, modes of living and a climate entirely different from the northerners, and they hate yankees worse than snakes, because they have cheated them or speculated on their credulity, with so many Connecticut wooden clocks, and New England notions. The people are proverbially idle or lazy, and mostly ignorant; reckoning nobody equal to themselves in many respects, and as it is a slave-holding state, Japheth will make Canaan serve him while he dwells in the tents of Shem.³²

The above source also belongs in a revised "Documentary History," as one of the most important Mormon insights into Jackson County conditions when major settlement was first beginning in 1831. One theme is the wonder of that luxuriant land, still enshrined in Phelps' hymn describing the prairie expanse: "Earth with her ten thousand flowers."³³ But a tragic countertheme is uneducated frontier prejudice, combined with predominating "customs, manners, modes of living" of the South. Joseph Smith was aware of these sources of conflict at the same time, witness the revelation given a week after Phelps' letter: "For after much tribulation come the blessings."³⁴

³²Full citation at footnote 7 above. My modifications for clarity are adjustments of punctuation and standardizations of spellings. Phelps may have had this document before him when writing the *HC*, judged by similar language on the soil of the prairies and descriptions of sheep and hogs. That is not certain, however, since some similarities seem to arise from habits of expression between this 1831 letter, the 1834 *Messenger and Advocate* letter, and even the "Far West" description in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, 1 (October 1832): editorial page.

³³Although this popular hymn adapts to a western setting, it originally captured the beauty of unspoiled Jackson County, where it was first published in *The Evening and the Morning Star*, 1 (September 1832). There is a remarkable similarity of impression in this hymn, Phelps' other allusions to prairie flowers, and eastern traveller's impressions. See Anderson, "Early Mormon Descriptions," pp. 287-88.

³⁴D&C 58:4 (1 August 1831). Compare earlier reports of Pratt and Cowdery, the latter indicating considerable opposition to the first Mormon message in Jackson County in the preceding winter, *HC* 1:182-83. For further development of the cultural conflict, see Anderson, "Early Mormon Descriptions," pp. 277-84.