

The Historians Corner

Edited by Ronald W. Walker

“Sorted till I was stupified,” James Boswell penned in his journal in June 1786. He was, of course, trying to arrange the mountains of material he had collected on Samuel Johnson before starting the latter’s biography. Latter-day Saint historians have experienced similar despair. The large LDS-related manuscript collections that must be mastered have been both the boon and bane of the historian’s craft.

Therefore, scholars will presumably greet this issue of the Historians Corner as a mixed blessing. Dr. Roger Launius, who is currently a civilian historian with the U.S. Air Force Military Airlift Command, describes an important manuscript collection that LDS scholars have scarcely mined. The papers of the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS), located at the Amistead Research Center in New Orleans, Louisiana, help to illustrate Mormonism throughout its nineteenth-century hegira. Written by Congregational, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and Associate Reformed frontier ministers, the LDS-related papers in the AHMS collection provide an outside and not always friendly view of the Saints. Consequently, they help to explain the negative image of nineteenth-century Mormonism, a continuing interest of present-day scholars.

THE AMERICAN HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY COLLECTION AND MORMONISM

Roger Launius

Historians of American religion have long known of the wealth of material contained in the collection of the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS), located at the Amistead Research Center, the

Roger Launius, a civilian historian with the Military Airlift Command, United States Air Force, has recently finished a two-volume dissertation at Louisiana State University on Joseph Smith III.