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The Joseph Smith Papers website is a wonderful resource. With thousands of documents and hundreds of resource pages, though, it can sometimes feel like you're searching for a needle in a haystack.

Finding Documents on the Joseph Smith Papers Website

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The Joseph Smith Papers website (josephsmithpapers.org) is a wonderful resource. With thousands of documents and hundreds of resource pages, though, it can sometimes feel like you're searching for a needle in a haystack. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how you might use the website to learn more about quotations and documents associated with the Prophet Joseph Smith.

To get started, consider that you or one of your students is reading *Saints: The Standard of Truth*. The last page of chapter 3 ("Plates of Gold") ends with the following discussion between Joseph Smith Sr. and his son Joseph Jr.:

His father asked at once if he had the plates.
"No," he said. "I could not get them."
"Did you see them?"
"I saw them but could not take them."
"I would have taken them," Joseph Sr. said, "if I had been in your place."
"You do not know what you say," Joseph said. "I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me."¹

Checking the notes section, you find note 32: “Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 86.” It is a source you are not familiar with, but since it’s about an experience in Joseph Smith’s life it seems reasonable that the website could have additional relevant information. Hoping to learn more, you visit josephsmithpapers.org to begin your search.

Selecting which words to search for is often a process of trial and error. For example, if you search for only a few words, you may receive too many search results. If you don’t find your search target on the first try, you may wish to add or remove a few words from your search. Don’t be afraid to experiment.

There are many ways you might search to find an original source for the dialogue referenced in *Saints*. Table 1 illustrates how widely your search results can vary if you do not search for exact phrases. Adding quotation marks signals the search engine to return only documents which contain the exact search phrase. Searching without quotation marks returns documents that contain all the individual words anywhere within a document.

Search Words	Comment	Search Results
I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me	Searching for an extended phrase; no quotation marks	90
plates angel Lord	Searching for a few key words	22
the angel of the Lord would not let me	Searching for a phrase; no quotation marks	153
“the angel of the Lord would not let me”	Same search as above, except enclosed in quotation marks	1
I would have taken them	Searching for an alternate phrase; no quotation marks	2,290
“I would have taken them”	Same search as above, except enclosed in quotation marks	1

Table 1. Sample Search Results

Both searches that included quotation marks returned the same document result: “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, Page 89.” (*Biographical Sketches*

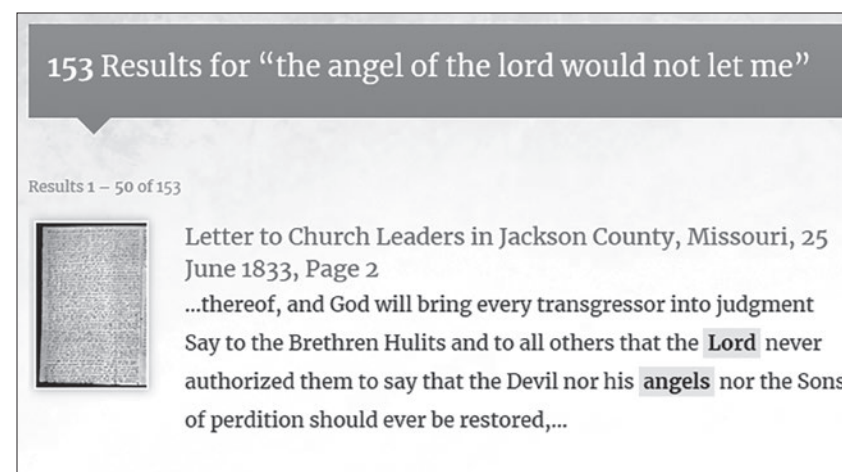


Image A

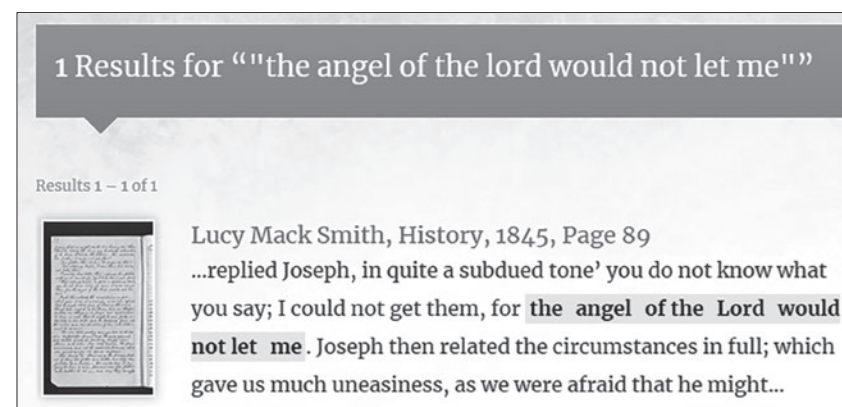


Image B

was the original title for Lucy Mack Smith’s history when it was published in Liverpool in 1853.²) With only one search result, our choice is easy. If your search yields multiple document options, the website provides four lines of text from the matching documents to help guide you in your selection. Finding the right document can often take several attempts.

Clicking on the “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845, Page 89” link, we see the source document for the quotation from *Saints*. Page 89 from Lucy Mack Smith’s 1845 history (image C) appears on the left side of the screen. A transcript of page 89 (image D) appears on the right side of the screen. Our

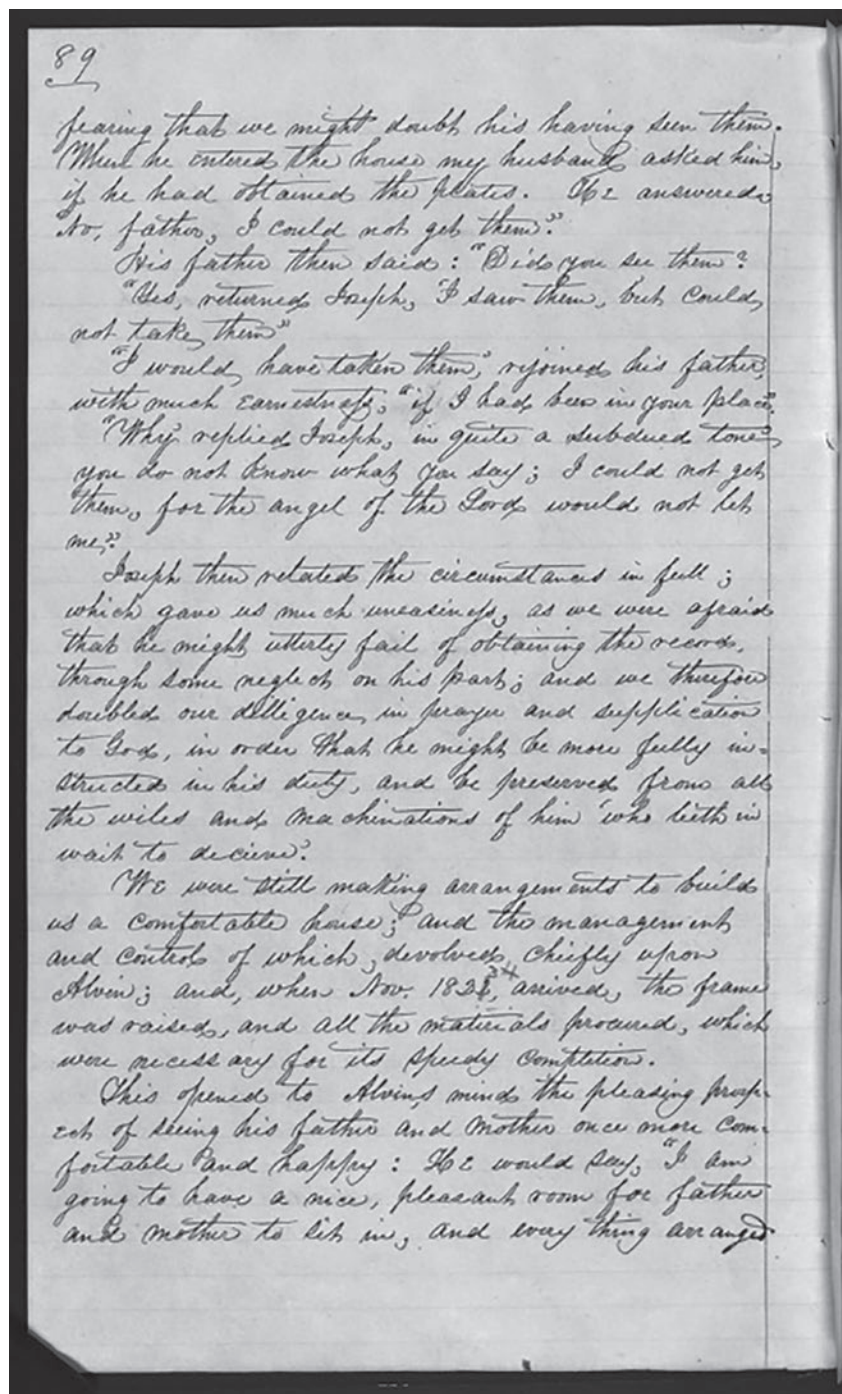


Image C

HOME / THE PAPERS

INTERIM CONTENT

Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845

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Source Note ▾

Historical Introduction ▾

← Page 89 →

☐ Hide editing marks

fearing that we might doubt his having seen them. When he entered the house my husband asked him, if he had obtained the plates. He answered, 'No, father, I could not get them.'

His father then said: "Did you see them?"

"Yes, returned Joseph, 'I saw them, but could not take them'"

"I would have taken them," rejoined his father, with much earnestness, "had if I had been in your place."

"Why" replied Joseph, in quite a subdued tone' you do not know what you say; I could not get them, for the angel of the Lord would not let me."

Image D

matching search text is highlighted in yellow. We can now view the quotation in context and easily read previous pages or following pages.³

When viewing a document transcript, you can show or hide editing marks. The editing marks show original line breaks, cross-outs, and other textual variations in the original document. For example, with editing marks turned on this sentence from the transcript is:

"I would have taken them," rejoined his father,
with much earnestness, "had if I had been in your place."

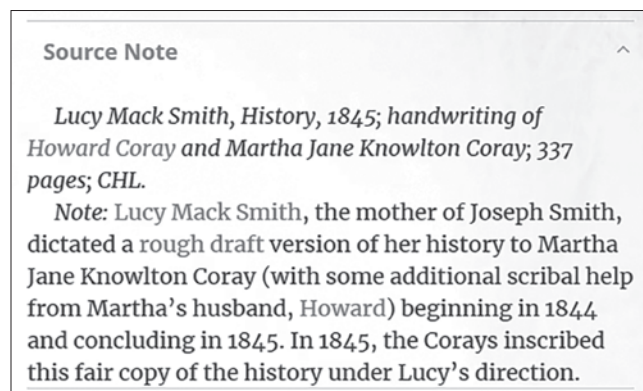
Here is the same text with the editing marks turned off:

“I would have taken them,” rejoined his father,
with much earnestness, “if I had been in your place.”

So far, finding a quotation on the Joseph Smith Papers website has been similar to looking it up in a book. The real power of the website starts to accrue at this point, as you are able to take advantage of the numerous resources and additional information available—all of it cross-linked. In addition to reading the text, you can review a table of contents for your search document, read source information about the document (by clicking the “Source Note” link), or learn more about the historical context of this document (by clicking the “Historical Introduction” link).

The source note for this document (image E) explains that “Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of Joseph Smith, dictated a rough draft version of her history to Martha Jane Knowlton Coray (with some additional scribal help from Martha’s husband, Howard) beginning in 1844 and concluding in 1845.” The Historical Introduction is lengthy but begins by explaining:

In June 1844, the church suffered the loss of its president and prophet, JS [Joseph Smith], and his brother, church patriarch Hyrum Smith. The Smith family, already devastated, endured another heartbreak a few weeks later with the death of JS’s brother Samuel. That fall their widowed mother, Lucy Mack Smith, perhaps in part as a salve to her grief, began recording her family’s story. Writing to her only surviving son, William, on 23 January 1845, Smith informed him, “I have by the council of the 12 [Apostles] undertaken a history of the family, that is my Father’s Family and my own.”



Source Note

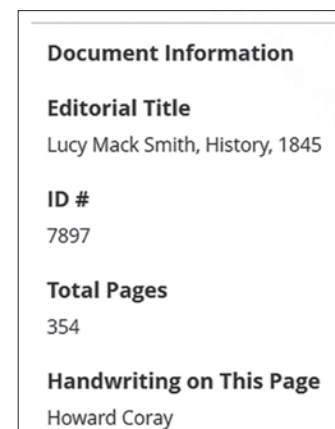
Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845; handwriting of Howard Coray and Martha Jane Knowlton Coray; 337 pages; CHL.

Note: Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of Joseph Smith, dictated a rough draft version of her history to Martha Jane Knowlton Coray (with some additional scribal help from Martha’s husband, Howard) beginning in 1844 and concluding in 1845. In 1845, the Corays inscribed this fair copy of the history under Lucy’s direction.

Image E

You are also given the opportunity to “View entire transcript” (in this instance, all 354 pages of Lucy Mack Smith’s History). You can see information about the document itself (using the “Document Information” link) (image F) and obtain citation information by clicking on the “Cite this page” page—which is very helpful if you are preparing a lesson handout or your students are writing a research paper. The citation information provided for this document is:

“Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845,” p. 89, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed February 22, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/lucy-mack-smith-history-1845/96>



Document Information

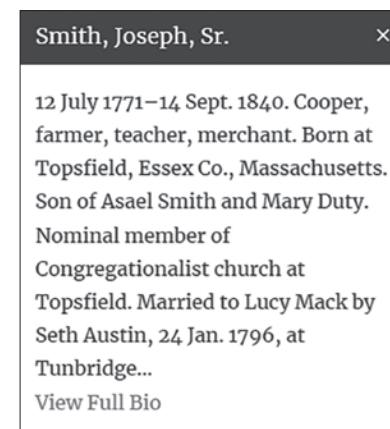
Editorial Title
Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845

ID #
7897

Total Pages
354

Handwriting on This Page
Howard Coray

Image F



Smith, Joseph, Sr.

12 July 1771–14 Sept. 1840. Cooper, farmer, teacher, merchant. Born at Topsfield, Essex Co., Massachusetts. Son of Asael Smith and Mary Duty. Nominal member of Congregationalist church at Topsfield. Married to Lucy Mack by Seth Austin, 24 Jan. 1796, at Tunbridge...
[View Full Bio](#)

Image G

At this point in your search, you can branch out and start exploring. Throughout the document transcripts are numerous highlighted words, such as: “His **father** then said: ‘Did you see them?’” Each highlighted word is hyperlinked to additional information. If you click on “**father**,” for example, a pop-up window with summary information will appear (image G).

If you click on the “View Full Bio” link, you will see a complete biography for Joseph Smith, Sr. (image H).


Each statement in a full biography is followed by a footnote that links to the source information for that fact about their life. For example, footnote 5 (which follows “Son of Asael Smith and Mary Duty”) provides this source information in a new pop-up window (image I).

Immediately beneath every full biography is a section labeled “Links” that includes a hyperlinked list of other documents on the website in which

Smith, Joseph, Sr.

Biography

12 July 1771^[1]–14 Sept. 1840^[2] Cooper, farmer, teacher, merchant.^[2] Born at Topsfield, Essex Co., Massachusetts.^[2] Son of Asael Smith and Mary Duty.^[2] Nominal member of Congregationalist church at Topsfield.^[2] Married to Lucy Mack by Seth Austin, 24 Jan. 1796, at Tunbridge, Orange Co., Vermont.^[2] Joined Universalist Society at Tunbridge, 1797.^[2] Entered mercantile business at Randolph, Orange Co., ca. 1802, and lost all in a ginseng root investment.^[2] Moved to Tunbridge, before May 1803; to Royalton, Windsor Co., Vermont, 1804; to Sharon, Windsor Co., by Aug. 1804; to Tunbridge, by Mar. 1808; to Royalton, by Mar. 1810; to Lebanon, Grafton Co., New Hampshire, 1811; to Norwich, Windsor Co., 1813; to Palmyra, Ontario Co., New York, 1816; and to Manchester, Ontario Co., 1825.^[2] One of the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon, June 1829.^[2] Baptized into Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by Oliver Cowdery, 6 Apr. 1830, most likely at Seneca Lake, Seneca Co., New York.^[2] With his son Don Carlos, served mission to family of his father in St. Lawrence Co., New York, Aug. 1830.^[2] Lived at The Kingdom, unincorporated settlement near Waterloo, Seneca Co., Nov. 1830–1831.^[2] Moved to Kirtland, Geauga Co., Ohio, 1831.^[2] Ordained a high priest by Lyman Wight, 4 June 1831.^[2] Attended first meeting of School of the Prophets, 22–23 Jan. 1833, in Kirtland.^[2] Member of Kirtland high council, 1834.^[2] Ordained patriarch of church and assistant president, 6 Dec. 1834.^[2] Labored on Kirtland temple.^[2] Served mission to eastern states with his brother John Smith, 1836.^[2] Stockholder in Kirtland Safety Society.^[2] Sustained as assistant counselor in First Presidency, 3 Sept. 1837.^[2] Left Ohio for Far West, Caldwell Co., Missouri, May 1838.^[2] Expelled from Missouri; migrated to Quincy, Adams Co., Illinois, Feb. 1839.^[2] Located at Commerce (later Nauvoo), Hancock Co., Illinois, spring 1839.^[2] Died at Nauvoo.^[2]



Joseph Smith Sr. (Courtesy Church History Museum, Salt Lake City)

Gender
Male

Image H

Note ×

Topsfield, Essex Co., MA, Records of Birth, Marriage, Death, and Intentions of Marriage, 1677–1833, vol. B, p. 59, microfilm 887,762, U.S. and Canada Record Collection, FHL; Manchester, Hillsborough Co., NH, Town Records, vol. 1, p. [2], microfilm 15,362, U.S. and Canada Record Collection, FHL.

Image I

this individual appears (as the author, the recipient, or someone who is simply mentioned). In the case of Joseph Smith Sr., the complete list is hundreds of documents long (image J).

You can select any of those document links and continue learning!

Like most research skills, your experience using the Joseph Smith Papers website will probably reflect two old adages: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again!” and “Practice makes perfect.” Some individual details of the

Links

Papers

History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]

History, 1838–1856, volume C-1 [2 November 1838–31 July 1842]

John Whitmer, History, 1831–circa 1847

Letter from Oliver Cowdery, 8 April 1831

Elders’ Journal, July 1838

General Joseph Smith’s Appeal to the Green Mountain Boys, December 1843

Times and Seasons, 1 August 1842

Times and Seasons, 1 March 1842

Times and Seasons, 1 September 1842

Image J

way the Joseph Smith Papers website works will almost certainly change over time, but the basic principles discussed here will still apply. A world of new information awaits you—limited only by your curiosity and available time. **RE**

Notes

1. *Saints: The Standard of Truth, 1815–1846* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), 30.
2. See Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 86; “Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many ‘Generations,’” Digital Collections: BYU Library, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/17401>.
3. I recommend searching the Joseph Smith Papers website using a desktop or laptop computer or a sufficiently sized tablet. A smartphone works well, but it will generally be a slower process.