Ronald K. Esplin

8

Modern Efforts to Preserve Church History

Today I spend my time immersed in the Joseph Smith Papers, a major documentary editing enterprise. Editing and publishing documents is a key thrust of the Church History Department and has been for its predecessors. Indeed, the pioneer Church Historian's Office grew out of the effort by Joseph Smith and his assistants, especially Willard Richards, the church historian, to compile a history using available documents, a labor that produced the text of the multivolume *History of the Church*. These early historians used Joseph Smith's journals to help connect these documents and provide a narrative thread to the history.

I have been both a witness to and a participant in the church's documentary editing and other record-keeping efforts of the past generation and a half. These activities have prepared the way for

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the Joseph Smith Papers Project and for future endeavors, which may include the papers of other church leaders. I wish to share some of my experiences with these efforts.

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH ARCHIVES

In 1972, the newly called church historian, Leonard J. Arrington, selected Davis Bitton and James B. Allen to be assistant church historians. Bitton wrote an article in 1983 called "Ten Years in Camelot: A Personal Memoir,"[1] which accurately described the decade under Arrington's direction as an idyllic time of excitement, discovery, access, openness, wonderful exchange, and great relationships with scholars both within the church and outside of it. Many people fondly remember Bitton's article. Unfortunately, however, the "Camelot" designation obscures as much as it reveals by implying that darkness descended after those ten years. That did not happen. Nor did the Arrington period arise out of a wasteland: important developments preceded it and laid a foundation for both the Arrington years and what we do today.

I would argue, in fact, that there is no better time to be a historian of the Latter-day Saint experience than today. We have more resources, opportunities, encouragement, and support than we have ever had. But the "ten years in Camelot," of which I was part, were important. I want to discuss those years and what we did in the 1970s to try to understand and reassemble Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's papers, initiatives that can be understood only by looking at Arrington's predecessors.

In a sense, all the work I do today—and the ten years or more that I spent working on Brigham Young's papers, as well as the further research I still intend to do—rests on the shoulders of people such as Willard Richards, an early church historian and recorder

who kept most of Joseph Smith's journals during the Nauvoo era and penned many other important records, and Thomas Bullock, a chief assistant. Working imperfectly and in challenging circumstances, they left a legacy of records that allow us to understand our past better than most communities can. One example of the limitations: those who are preparing for publication the journals Richards kept for Joseph Smith in Nauvoo quip that they will never forgive Joseph Smith for selecting a doctor as his scribe. Although Willard could write legibly, when he was trying to take dictation or capture the spoken language of a discourse, his handwriting often deteriorated into a nearly illegible scrawl. Nevertheless, he contributed to the richness of our documentary heritage, both by creating important records and by gathering up and preserving documents. In 1845 and 1846, Richards, Bullock, and others oversaw efforts to gather all the church's records and box them up for the journey across the plains.

Although Joseph Smith launched his expansive history in Nauvoo and the early years were completed before his death, the project was not finished until more than a decade later in Utah. In fact, work on the history continued several years after the death of Willard Richards in 1854. After Richards's premature death, other luminaries held the office of church historian and, with associates, labored in the Church Historian's Office in early Utah; these included George A. Smith, Wilford Woodruff, and Orson Pratt. Once they had completed the history of Joseph Smith, they and others in the Church Historian's Office went on to compile a comparable chronological collection of papers for the Brigham Young period, a pattern that continued with the manuscript history of John Taylor after Brigham Young died in 1877.

Given the priority of these histories, it is not surprising that a major work of the Church Historian's Office in the nineteenth

century was to collect documents and organize them chronologically. By the late nineteenth century, after the Church Historian's Office had finished the histories (which eventually metamorphosed into a slightly different product called the Journal History), they began figuring out how to answer other kinds of questions from their rich holdings. They consequently ended up rearranging many of the holdings, initially filed mainly chronologically, into subject files. So, for example, if a letter from Brigham Young was about Cedar City, it went into the Cedar City file. If it was about Mountain Meadows, it went into the Mountain Meadows file.

The hiring of new professional staff in the 1960s and 1970s created the opportunity to improve the care and organization of the records, beginning with Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's documents. Twentieth-century innovations in copying and indexing provided options earlier historians lacked. The wonders of electronic scans and electronic filing, for instance, offer possibilities undreamed of in the nineteenth century, permitting the same document to simultaneously "reside" in different research files. Earlier historians had fewer options for filing and organization. During his lifetime, Brigham Young's approximately thirty-five thousand incoming letters were filed chronologically (or chronologically by correspondent). To facilitate accessing them topically, later staff reorganized thousands into subject files, ignoring a cardinal principle of modern archivists to preserve original order. So what would these later archivists, with new professional tools, do?

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE ARCHIVES

Some have pointed to Jeffery O. Johnson's arrival in the old Church Historian's Office in 1969 as the beginning of the professionalization of the archives. That professionalization is crucial

to everything I do today and much of what we want to do as a church in understanding our heritage. Jeff, however, points to Dean C. Jessee's arrival in November 1964. Indeed, Dean may have been the first person in the Church Historian's Office who already had professional training in history or manuscripts when he was hired.[2] Dean had worked in Brigham Young University's Special Collections, had earned a master's degree in church history from Brigham Young University, and was teaching seminary. He didn't have formal training as an archivist at the time, but he was arguably the first to get a vision of what an archive ought to be and how we ought to treat our records. By February 1971, he and Jeff, along with Max J. Evans, helped lay a foundation for professional archives that revolutionized how we handle records in the church.

The story of Dean's hiring is worth telling. While he was doing regular research in the archives of the Church Historian's Office, he wondered about the possibility of gaining employment there. When he asked, he was directed to Earl E. Olson, a longtime employee in the office and a grandson of the great pioneer assistant church historian Andrew Jenson. Earl said there was indeed an opening and encouraged Dean to seek an interview with Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, the church historian.

When Dean was ushered into Joseph Fielding Smith's office, Elder Smith, engrossed with the papers on his desk, did not immediately look up or engage him in conversation. Thought Dean, "How do I get his attention? I really want this job!" Finally they had a short conversation, one Elder Smith concluded somewhat abruptly: "You look like a very nice young man, but we don't have an opening. Good day."

A day or two later Earl called Dean and asked for a report. Dean explained that he had visited with Elder Smith as instructed,

only to be told that there was no opening. "There is an opening," Earl insisted. "Let's try again!" This time the result was better. "Well, we have work to do," Elder Smith agreed, and perhaps Dean could join the staff.

Somewhat apologetically, staff members told Dean that he would have to work at one of four desks in "the cage"—the very place where many of the most important records were housed! There, inside this big steel cage, surrounded by Joseph Smith's and Brigham Young's papers and other important documents, Dean happily settled in and began his work.

It would be five years before Jeff Johnson, the second professionally trained staff member hired to work with manuscripts, came aboard. Two years later, in 1971, and some months before Arrington was appointed church historian in early 1972, the third professional, Max J. Evans, was hired as a cataloger when a slot opened with the death of assistant church historian A. William Lund.

Until his death in 1971, Lund served as a primary gatekeeper of the records. When I began work with the newly organized Church Historical Department in 1972, I heard numerous Brother Lund stories. The thrust of them was that the researcher first had to secure Lund's reluctant permission to look at the records, and then figure out how to make research notes and benefit from use of the records—even though Lund never warmed up to the idea that scholars should be so intimately involved with the manuscripts.

Beginning in the early 1970s, then, Max and Jeff, assisted by Dean and soon joined by others, oversaw a full professionalization of the archives—a professionalization that prepared the way for the success of Leonard Arrington and the History Division and for everything we do today, including our work on the

Joseph Smith Papers Project. I had the wonderful opportunity of spending five of my ten years at the Historical Department in the archives being mentored by Jeff and Max, who helped me understand both the state of our collection and the archival principles upon which we could make it better.

Interestingly, one of the projects Jeff and I worked on together in the 1970s was a Joseph Smith project. Jeff did the first professional organization of the Joseph Smith collection and prepared the first register. I then wrote the brief historical and biographical introduction for that register. And now, more than thirty years later, Jeff has returned to the department after fourteen years as the Utah state archivist, and I am back after twenty-five years at Brigham Young University. We are both working on the Joseph Smith Papers Project.

In the mid-1970s, Max Evans left the Historical Department to become assistant state archivist of Wisconsin. Subsequently he returned to Utah to become director of the Utah State Historical Society, and he later served as the executive director of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Operating under the National Archives, this commission plays an important role in American documentary editing, certifying projects like the Joseph Smith Papers, and funding many such projects. Max returned to the Church History Department in February 2008 after five years with the NHPRC. He and several other pioneers who helped professionalize the archives more than a generation ago—myself included—are now back at the end of their careers.

As noted, one of the important challenges the professional staff faced in the 1970s stemmed from the fact that records had been organized and reorganized by several generations of earlier lay archivists. Emphasis on provenance, chain of custody, original

order, and other archival principles guided these new professionals. Provenance has to do with when a document was created, why it was created, and who created it. Chain of custody has to do with where the document has been over the years. Each document raises questions: Do we know the history of the item? Do we know who created it and when? Is there a clear chain of custody? Is the document included in early inventories?

In the 1980s, many were taken in by Mark Hofmann's forgeries. If individuals had paid close attention to the provenance, as an archivist might, perhaps fewer would have been deceived. Looking at these "newly discovered" documents not as a historian but as an archivist, Jeff Johnson felt that they never fully agreed with the already known historical record, nor did the known provenance of Hofmann forgeries conform to what he, as an archivist, expected.

The provenance of most documents in the Church History Library is reasonably clear. Early inventories and other records demonstrate that many of them have been in the custody of the church since the mid-nineteenth century. Therefore, when we publish them as part of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, or any future project, we can do so with confidence that these are genuine historical documents. Even so, we often go to considerable length to carefully research their creation, their chain of custody, and all the other factors that can help us authenticate them.

Original order is also important. Even though collections often come into the archives without the kind of systematic, carefully thought-out order one might hope for and some order may have to be supplied, an archivist prefers to preserve the original order as closely as possible. However, as we have now seen, after decades of use for various purposes, an "original order" for many of the items in the Church Archives no longer existed. What

remained were many clues and some general sense of what a few of the collections once were. There was no way to return to an original order of the past, but reassembling important collections in a logical and usable order that resembled earlier use and order made sense. Doing so for the Brigham Young Collection became a major focus of my work in the archives during the 1970s.

MY ROAD TO THE CHURCH HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT

Allow me to explain the circumstances that led me to the Church Historical Department in 1972 and fostered my personal interest in Brigham Young, his life, and his papers. I studied at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville—Mr. Jefferson's university—for my master's degree. My full intention when I went to Virginia was to complete an MA degree and then return to the West to write a dissertation on Brigham Young. I have since tried to recover where that expectation came from, but cannot, though I know it was very much a part of my perspective as I studied history at UVA. It was not by chance that I associated there with professors who were specialists in biographies of early American figures, especially Bernard Mayo, who had written a prize-winning biography of Henry Clay.[3]

It was with more than passing interest, then, that I encountered while at Virginia a recently published (1969) biography of Brigham Young titled *The Lion of the Lord*.[4] Written by Stanley P. Hirshson and supported by a prestigious national fellowship, this had the appearance of being a work of serious scholarship, but I soon discovered serious flaws. After spending a short time in the Church Historian's Office in Salt Lake City, Hirshson felt less than welcome and grew impatient with the slow pace of gaining access to materials, and so he left. At first discouraged about the

prospects of completing his study, he found in New York City a treasure trove of materials on Brigham Young and early Utah that revived his spirits. Can you imagine what it was? It was the New York Public Library's collection of newspaper accounts about Utah and the early church, written by Brigham Young's enemies. Hirshson wrote a biography based on those accounts. The book is a wonderful index to the New York Public Library collection of generally critical newspaper reporting, but it is not a good guide to the life and personality of Brigham Young. My future work on Brigham Young, I vowed, would be informed by the sources closest to him, and not based on secondhand accounts of his critics.

Another event that related to my time at the University of Virginia, even though it occurred several years later, also underscored my conviction that proper use of the best sources is essential to good history. In 1974 Fawn Brodie, who had earlier written a biography of Joseph Smith that drew criticism from Latter-day Saint scholars because of her selection and use of sources, published her biography of Thomas Jefferson.[5] It was interesting for me to watch from afar the reaction of University of Virginia professors, well-versed on Jefferson and sometime defenders of his legacy, as they challenged her methodology in writing about him. Earlier, they would not have understood or accepted the reasoning of Latter-day Saint scholars who tried to point out the same flaws in her writing about Joseph Smith; now, thoroughly grounded in the sources for the study of Jefferson, they understood the shortcomings of Brodie's work.

In 1970 I left the University of Virginia, degree in hand, to pursue my PhD in history at Brigham Young University. I was committed, as I noted, to doing a dissertation on Brigham Young. A year and a few months after I enrolled, Leonard Arrington was called as the church historian, and the Church Historian's Office

was reorganized into a modern Church Historical Department with a History Division (for research and writing), an Archives Division, and a Library Division. The scene was set for what would become a pivotal turn in my own career.

In the spring of 1972 the newly organized Historical Department was looking ahead to later in the year when its substantial collections of books, manuscripts, and records would be moved from the Church Administration Building—which for decades had housed the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, and the Church Historian's Office—to the east wing of the new Church Office Building. James B. Allen, my dissertation adviser, had just been called as assistant church historian in January. Knowing of my commitment to research Brigham Young and of the desire of the church historian, Leonard Arrington, to understand a cache of Brigham Young–era records before the move, Jim arranged to get us together. At the luncheon where we got acquainted, Leonard made me an offer I could not refuse. In essence, he asked: "Will you come to Salt Lake this summer and go through some Brigham Young papers? Nobody knows what they are, how they got there, or why they are there. We need to know about them so that we can catalog them and get ready for the move."

I was already under contract with the Church Educational System to teach in California, where I would be responsible for a couple of small, part-time institutes. But I thought that going through the papers in the basement of the Church Office Building would be an amazing way to spend the summer, an opportunity to get into the original records and begin serious work on Brigham Young.

Most of the manuscripts, including many Brigham Young documents, were then housed in the Church Historian's Office on the third floor of the Church Administration Building. The

records I was assigned to review, however, were in a basement storage room filled with ductwork, with books and papers crammed into all the crevices of the window well and around the ductwork from floor to ceiling. The room was interesting, but what it contained made it even more so. Every morning I would go into the quaint third floor space so long occupied by the Church Historian's Office, say hello to Dean Jessee, Jeff Johnson, and others who were there, and then make my way to the basement.

Let me digress for a moment about doing research back in those days. Though Professor Hirshson had not felt welcome, many other scholars had. In 1972 I daily found Robert J. Woodford in the cramped reading area doing the seminal work on the Doctrine and Covenants that became his dissertation.[6] Edward Leo Lyman was there many days, working on what became his dissertation and later his book, *Political Deliverance*.[7] People who were truly dedicated could do great work in the old Church Historian's Office. As a young scholar in the 1940s, long before he became the church historian, Leonard Arrington was given sage advice by an old hand at research in the incomparable collections of the Church Historian's Office. Rather than getting discouraged, he was counseled, "Just keep going in until you're part of the woodwork, and eventually you will be able to see anything you need to!" Arrington's deeply researched, richly detailed dissertation was eventually published by Harvard University Press as the impressive *Great Basin Kingdom*.[8]

Stanley Hirshson was just wrong. He was impatient. He expected to have everything made available to him the first day he walked in the door. One could do great work, but it required patience and diligence.

Even a patient Leonard Arrington, however, had not gained access to the materials in the basement overflow storage, and no

one was certain what was there. Soon, and day after day, I found myself going through fascinating records, most of them from the Brigham Young era. Among the things I uncovered were massive ledger books, some of which said on the spine, "Trustee in Trust" or "Brigham Young Sr." Brigham Young's office was the economic center of Utah Territory. Books labeled "Trustee in Trust" were for church-owned businesses; books labeled "Brigham Young Sr." were for companies that Brigham Young oversaw more directly. These ledgers, stacked in piles and seemingly untouched for decades, had the potential to reveal the economic life of early Utah, the foundation of which was a system based on scrip and trust, not coin. Historian Ronald G. Watt, whom the department hired in the early days of professionalization, retired in 2008 but has since returned as a missionary with an assignment that includes finalizing the cataloguing of those impressive ledgers—and better understanding their uses.

Another interesting discovery I made in that basement relates to the mail system. The early Saints accused the government of tampering with the mail during the Utah War in 1857 and 1858. As I sorted these basement papers I found copies of the correspondence of Alfred Cumming, who in 1857 traveled west to replace Brigham Young as governor. If the United States government tampered with the Latter-day Saints' mail, apparently, in turn, the Saints had access to the mail of the governor-to-be. I also found materials that had to do with the confrontation between the federal government and early Utah officials in the 1850s that led to the Utah War.

For example, in 1852 U.S. president Millard Fillmore insisted that Brigham Young answer a string of charges from his critics. Fillmore had been a friend to Brigham Young and Utah, and the Saints reciprocated: Brigham Young designated Fillmore in

Millard County as Utah's territorial capital. But eventually the political cost of keeping Brigham Young in office caused President Fillmore to accede to the critics to the extent that he asked Brigham Young to formally answer the charges of those critics as published in the *Congressional Globe*, the *Congressional Record* of the day. The result was a hundred-page manuscript written by Brigham Young's clerks, with Willard Richards apparently taking the lead. In that manuscript, the clerks, speaking for Brigham Young, answered the charges point by point, either with facts or with hyperbole. The manuscript begins by saying:

> For me to attempt to prove a negative, on the general tenor of said Report, made up of hearsays and declarations, without a shadow of testimony on the affirmative, would be as extra judicial as it was for Don Quixote to perpetuate his war fame at the battle of the windmill; or as it was for the giant Kill-all to load a hundred and twenty four cannon to the brim to shoot a musquito. Cash for cash, and credit against credit, I therefore make my explanations in the coin I receive, simple declarations, with this difference, i.e. between coin counterfeit and true.[9]

The letter then responded to the charges as enumerated in the *Globe*.

This was a fascinating document, one hundred pages written in the name of the president of the church to the president of the United States, though we never could find proof that it had been finalized and sent because the document does not appear to be among Millard Fillmore's papers.

One of the charges listed in the *Congressional Globe* was that, according to Judge Perry E. Brocchus, President Young had said, "Zachary Taylor is dead and gone to hell, and I am glad of it."[10] Zachary Taylor was a recently deceased president of the United

States. Brigham Young responded that he hadn't said any such thing. Instead, it was his counselor, Heber C. Kimball—and Kimball had added that if Brocchus felt the statement was in error, Brocchus could check when he himself went to hell.

In the official response from Brigham Young's office, President Young's clerks represented their leader as saying, "If Judge Brocchus does not find 'General Taylor in hell when he gets there,' it may be incumbent on Elder Kimball to acknowledge a false prophecy; but how is he to be convicted before hand? . . . If to prove the thing, [Brocchus] is disposed to go to hell forthwith, if he don't find his friend Taylor there, I will be responsible that Elder Kimball will acknowledge his error. But if it prove true, the Rev[d] Elder [Brocchus] will have to foot the bill, and get out of hell the best way he can."[11]

This is not the only thing in Brigham Young's papers that suggests both that his office staff employed humor to deflect criticism and that they enjoyed such humor. When it was proposed that Utah was guilty of gross crimes and misdemeanors because of plural marriage, Brigham Young's clerks created an official-looking affidavit acknowledging that Utah was guilty and affirming that, as punishment, the entire territory should be declared a federal prison. Anyone not guilty under the forthcoming act, they said, should vacate the premises forthwith.[12]

Clearly that summer of 1972 got us into a number of interesting records. These were not the heart of the Brigham Young collection; that came later. But they were important, and this gave us a glimpse into significant records that had not yet been mined by other historians.

Several times a week during that summer, I would give a report to Leonard Arrington on what I had found and we would discuss its significance. Leonard was probably even more delighted

than I was to learn of all these wonderful documents.[13] There was so much to sort through that I could not review it all before my summer fellowship was to expire. Naturally, Leonard did not want the work to stop, so he approached me with a proposition. "You haven't finished. I hired you to do a job, and it's not done. You can't leave." I responded that I had a contract to teach with Seminaries and Institutes in southern California, had already arranged for movers, and therefore, "I can't *not* leave!" He went away a little dejected, only to return to the topic two weeks later. "I've talked to Joe J. Christensen, the associate commissioner of church education, and he says you can stay. Now will you stay?" So I stayed, and not just for a year or two, either.

Reassembling Brigham Young's Collection

In November 1972, the entire historical collection was successfully moved from the Church Administration Building to the new Church Office Building. Staff accomplished this by pushing carts loaded with books and manuscript boxes from the lower level of the Church Administration Building through the underground parking plaza and into the east wing, where the treasures got new homes on the third and fourth floors. Once settled into our new home, we finally had the opportunity to try to reestablish the Brigham Young collection. I remember joking with other archives staff members that when we were done we would dedicate a room to the tens of thousands of pages of sources Stanley Hirshson never used in his biography of Brigham Young—huge letterpress copy books, each with a thousand or more outgoing letters, tens of thousands of telegrams and incoming letters, many journals, massive account books, and a large number of other documents.

Our challenge was to go through the department's holdings, especially the subject and chronological files, and to pull together the documents that had once been part of Brigham Young's office. I spent about half of my ten years at the Church Historical Department searching through the nineteenth-century collections and looking for letters to and from Brigham Young, along with anything else that had been created by or once cared for in his office.

Many clues besides the words "Dear President Young" helped us figure out what was and was not his. Endorsements and other file notations were enormously helpful, but so were such things as a small registry of materials created by Evan Green, who for a time worked in the president's office. Among other items, we found a filing index that showed how the pigeonholes in the church president's writing desk had once been labeled. Several presidents whose papers I came across had a "crank file" for strange, off-the-wall letters. In Brigham Young's case, he received a number of letters from "Elijah," which went into the crank file, although his office didn't call it that. The filing list says, "Balderdash. See Trash." They had a pigeonhole labeled "Trash" for letters that did not merit response or follow-up.

Eventually we were able to reassemble much of the collection that was once housed in President Young's office. The notations on the various records, such as filing notations on the back of documents, helped us to identify something as belonging to Brigham Young's office, and once those materials were reassembled, it was possible to better understand both the notations and the filing system. We had no illusions that we knew the original order of the documents, although in some cases we had a pretty good idea. Why does that matter? It is important because records provide more information if they are reviewed in context. We

can then learn how records relate to other records, how they were used, and how they were filed.

That project involved a massive effort. When I left to go to Brigham Young University in 1982, Christy Best continued the work. There may still be a few loose ends, but it is nevertheless a wonderful collection, and we have it because of the dedication that generations of record keepers displayed in preserving and protecting those documents.

DOCUMENTARY EDITING EFFORTS SINCE THE 1970S

The work of Dean C. Jessee, Jeff Johnson, Max Evans, and later successors such as director of the Church Archives Steven R. Sorensen created the kind of archival foundation required for the success of larger-scale documentary editing projects like *The Joseph Smith Papers*. Similarly, the research on Joseph Smith done over a lifetime by historians such as Richard L. Anderson, Ronald O. Barney, and Larry C. Porter has laid a scholarly foundation. The two together make possible the publishing of a comprehensive edition of *The Joseph Smith Papers*.

When Dean Jessee started working in the cage in 1964, he realized immediately that the church had a magnificent collection of Joseph Smith materials, and almost from that beginning he had a vision of what must eventually be done with them. In 1943, the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Thomas Jefferson, historian and editor Julian P. Boyd launched the nation's first fully professional and modern project of documentary editing—the publication of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Boyd and his assistants labored until 1950 gathering and preparing materials before they published the first volume, but volumes started to appear with some regularity thereafter (nineteen volumes in print

by 1974). The volumes available by the time Dean Jessee started at the Church Historian's Office in 1964 provided him with a vision for what he hoped one day to see done for the papers of Joseph Smith.[14] As Boyd was doing for Jefferson, as Leonard W. Labaree was doing for Benjamin Franklin (an edition I relied heavily on when I wrote my master's thesis),[15] and as still others were doing for John Adams and George Washington, so Dean hoped that the Church Historian's Office might one day do for Joseph Smith. This became his vision.

When Leonard Arrington was called as the church historian in 1972, out of all the employees in the Church Historian's Office (soon to be reorganized into the Historical Department of the church), he selected Dean Jessee to become the first full-time historian in the newly organized History Division, the division charged not with collecting and preserving the records but with using them. He invited Dean to find the right documents and help get them into print.

Although Dean was most interested in Joseph Smith, for a variety of reasons it became clear that for publication he should start with a collection he also cared about and had previously done work on: the letters of Brigham Young to his sons. In 1974 that collection was published in what was called the Heritage Series, copublished by the Church Historical Department and Deseret Book.[16] Dean then resumed his work on Joseph Smith's papers. He published seminal articles that extended our understanding of the records kept by and for Joseph Smith[17] while also getting several important documents into print. This work continued at Brigham Young University when, in 1982, Leonard became the director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History instead of the church historian and director of the History Division of the Church Historical Department.

In 1984 Dean Jessee published *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* the first of his several volumes of Joseph Smith documents.[18] To celebrate this landmark publication, we had a small gathering on the BYU campus. Jeffrey R. Holland, president of the university, and a number of other campus leaders attended the event. I remember saying, in effect, "This changes the landscape. Stanley Hirshson could write about Brigham Young without using his papers. But after this, you can't write about Joseph Smith without using his papers." That was not an accurate prophecy. The first edition of Joseph Smith's personal writings sold tens of thousands of copies among Latter-day Saints and even more when it was reissued in 2002, but the volumes did not equally penetrate the library and academic markets where historians and writers could easily access them. Eventually we understood that we had to do something more ambitious.

That more ambitious initiative was first conceived of as an edition of nine or ten volumes, perhaps with an index and a reference volume, to bring the total number of volumes to a dozen. By that time, Leonard had retired and I was serving as director of the Smith Institute. Although I made certain that Dean had student help and all the support and encouragement we could muster, it was still mainly a one-man effort to publish the papers of Joseph Smith. Blessed with talent and energy, Dean published two volumes in the late 1980s and early 1990s before, for a variety of reasons, the third volume stalled. Dean continued his efforts to get his arms around the whole corpus of Joseph Smith documents, but the publishing was at a standstill.

By the late 1990s it became clear that we needed an even bigger project—and that Dean Jessee could not do it alone. By the summer of 2000, an ambitious plan had been prepared as a collaboration between the Church Historical Department and

BYU, with the editors to be drawn mainly from Brigham Young University professors: Grant Underwood, Richard L. Jensen, and William G. Hartley of the Smith Institute; Alexander L. Baugh, Steven C. Harper, and Andrew H. Hedges from Religious Education; and David J. Whittaker from the Lee Library.

In June 2000 Barbara Oberg, one of Julian Boyd's successors as the editor of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, spent a couple of days with us at Brigham Young University and at the Church Archives. Later some of our people visited her operation at Princeton. These exchanges helped us prepare for a larger and more professional project. Richard L. Bushman, professor of history at Columbia and a member of the board of the Hay Papers, also contributed enthusiasm and expertise. By early 2001, with the endorsement and assistance of Richard E. Turley Jr., managing director of the Family and Church History Department, we were ready to seek official authorization from church leaders to publish all of Joseph Smith's papers in the church's possession.

By March 2001 we were also ready for an unusual meeting with Utah businessman and philanthropist Larry H. Miller. Larry had long been interested in history, and he often used history in his teaching—whether he was addressing executive MBA students at BYU, the senior executives of his companies, or the young people he taught in church assignments. He did the same when he spoke to the civic or church groups he was often invited to address. Ironically, however, Joseph Smith had never been the subject of any of his talks until the fall of 2000. Then, on three different occasions between November 2000 and January 2001, he felt prompted to change his topic at the last minute to speak about Joseph Smith.

Larry popularized a phrase that has become something of an informal motto among Joseph Smith Papers personnel: "How

many coincidences does it take before you realize it's not a coincidence?" Unbeknownst to Larry, at the time he was prompted to talk about Joseph Smith, we were working to launch the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Unbeknownst to us, in early 2001 Larry had experienced his first-ever encounter with the personal papers of Joseph Smith during a presentation of the original documents by Ron Barney of the Church Archives. Larry had simply attended the presentation with a friend, David Brown, who with his wife was preparing to serve a mission in Kirtland, Ohio, but it was an experience that Larry could not get out of his mind. All this was context for a meeting in early March 2001, ironically in the same east wing conference room where Larry had weeks before first seen the manuscripts. Forever after Larry called this the "meeting of the three Rons and a Steve"—Ron Esplin, Ron Walker, Ron Barney, and Steve Sorensen.

I was director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute at the time, and Ron Walker was the institute's director of research. Ron had said to me, "Now, you give him the pitch and tell him what it's all about. You can sell that better than anybody, but you can't close; you'll be too timid. You need me to get in there and close the deal." So Ron Walker jumped in at the end and boldly announced, "This is the church's Manhattan Project," a characterization Larry never forgot, "and it will take at least $100,000 to make a dent in it." Larry thought for a minute and then said, "How about $125,000 a year for the next three years?" He told us later that he had known then that that initial sum was just a down payment—and that he was convinced we had no clue how much money this was going to take. Ultimately, he provided us with an endowment, the annual income of which dwarfs that first commitment. Were it not for the Millers' generosity, we could not do

what we do today with a staff of archivists, historians, and editors working together on Joseph Smith's papers.

We also learned later how Larry's encounter with the documents had prepared him for our meeting. Instead of a quick tutorial on Kirtland history, Ron Barney used original documents to vividly explain several crucial episodes in the life of Joseph Smith and the history of the early church. That "show and tell" with Ron Barney was the first time history buff Larry had even thought about the original manuscripts, and it changed his life and eventually ours. Larry left the archives that day knowing in his heart that there was something he was supposed to do with the documents. He soon called Ron Barney and said, "We've got to talk!" He made a follow-up visit with Ron that seemingly resolved nothing. "There's something here that I'm supposed to help with. Do you know what it is?" he asked Ron.

"No," Ron responded, but he went on to speak about various ongoing projects. Sitting on a filing cabinet in Ron's office was a copy of volume 3 of the Papers of Joseph Smith, still unpublished, which I had asked Ron to read as part of our effort to get the book back on track. Ron pointed to the volume and talked about Dean Jessee's work. Then Larry left, still puzzled.

The next time Larry visited Ron Barney, he was animated. "I know what I'm supposed to do!" he told Ron. "I know too," insisted Ron, and they then shared their insight that it had to do with Dean Jessee's work. Their conversation that day deepened Larry's conviction that he was supposed to help with the Joseph Smith Papers, which set the stage for the "meeting of the three Rons and a Steve."

At that meeting in March 2001 we told Larry that an expanded Joseph Smith Papers project was not yet approved. "We think we'll get approval, but it has not yet come. There is still

some risk involved." He chuckled and said that he knew a little about risk. "I think I can handle that." In April 2001 we received official approval from the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to publish all of Joseph Smith's papers. In June, a number of church leaders (Elders Neal A. Maxwell, Jeffrey R. Holland, and Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve, and Elders Bruce C. Hafen and D. Todd Christofferson of the Seventy) along with BYU president Merrill J. Bateman (also of the Seventy) met at BYU with project personnel to officially launch the Joseph Smith Papers Project.

Since that time we have built a staff and moved the entire project to the Church History Department in Salt Lake City—and next to the historical documents we are publishing. Although much of the day-to-day work can be accomplished with colored scans of the original documents, having access to the originals as needed and being able to look at the documents together in context has been a great blessing. Some of the work we have since done could not have been accomplished at BYU, leading us to realize again that for historians and archivists who are doing intensive work on the early history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, no place on earth is better than the church's own archives.

THE NEW CHURCH HISTORY LIBRARY

I had hoped that the new Church History Library might be known as the Church Archives, because for me that is the heart of the department, but I must agree that "Church History Library" is more inviting. That is the approach today: come learn our history, your history. Jeff Johnson rescued a brass plaque from the old Church Historian's Office that for years stood above the door into the holdings, a plaque that said, "Library. No admittance."

In contrast, today's wonderful new library will stand as an invitation to all to come in and explore the rich heritage that is the history of the Latter-day Saints.

The remarkable collection of documents found in the Church History Library owes much to Willard Richards and his successors; to the custodians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century; to the pioneers of professionalization—Dean Jessee, Jeff Johnson, Max Evans, and Steven Sorensen—and to the many professionals who care for the collection today. The combined efforts of all these individuals and many others allow us to protect this heritage, learn from it, and finally, today, to make more of it easily accessible to more people. Increasingly, researchers and writers everywhere will have access to this treasure trove of documents that have been carefully preserved by dedicated individuals and are now housed in the secure, climate-controlled storage vaults of the Church History Library.

NOTES

1. Davis Bitton, "Ten Years in Camelot: A Personal Memoir," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 9–20.
2. Predating both Dean Jessee and Jeffery Johnson was a professional librarian, Janet Jenson, who had a master's degree in library science from Brigham Young University.
3. Bernard Mayo, *Henry Clay: Spokesman of the New West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937).
4. Stanley P. Hirshson, *The Lion of the Lord: A Biography of Brigham Young* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).
5. Fawn Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974).
6. Robert J. Woodford, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants," 3 vols. (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1974).

7. Edward Leo Lyman, "The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood" (PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 1981); Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).
8. Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Economic Policies and Their Implementation on the Western Frontier, 1847–1900" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 1952); Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).
9. Brigham Young to the President of the United States, June 11, 1852, Brigham Young, Office Files, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
10. "Utah Territory: Report from the Secretary of State," *Appendix to the Congressional Globe*, new series, vol. 25 (Washington, DC: John C. Rives, 1852), 85.
11. Young to the President of the United States, June 11, 1852, Young Office Files.
12. Citizens of Utah to the President of the United States, "Burlesque Petition," Young Office Files.
13. Ronald K. Esplin, "Documents and Dusty Tomes: The Adventure of Arrington, Esplin, and Young," *Journal of Mormon History* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 103–12.
14. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd, 36 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950–2009).
15. *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Leonard Woods Labaree and William Bradford Wilcox, 39 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959–2008).
16. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974).
17. For example, see Dean C. Jessee, "The Reliability of Joseph Smith's History," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 23–46; Dean C. Jessee, "Return to Carthage: Writing the History of Joseph Smith's Martyrdom," *Journal of Mormon History* 8 (1981): 3–19.
18. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984).