



PREFACE

REFLECTING UPON HIS PROPHETIC PREDECESSOR, PRESIDENT BRIGHAM YOUNG SAID THAT “JOSEPH Smith was a poet, and poets are not like other men; their gaze is deeper, and reaches the roots of the soul; it is like that of the searching eyes of angels; they catch the swift thought of God and reveal it to us.”¹ Of Joseph’s poetic contribution, Elder Orson F. Whitney—a prolific poet himself—added, “Joseph Smith was not a Homer, nor a Shakespeare, nor a Milton. He was more. He was a prophet, and consequently a poet.” Joseph unfolded “the great poem called ‘Mormonism,’ the grandest and sublimest epic ever conceived.”² Luckily, early Latter-day Saints captured the epic as it unfolded before them in Nauvoo, Illinois.

1. Eugene Campbell, ed., *The Essential Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 241.

2. Orson F. Whitney, “Joseph Smith in Literature,” *Improvement Era* 9, no. 1 (December 1905): 135-53.

In this growing city, poets found ample publication outlets in the *Times and Seasons*, the *Wasp*, and the *Nauvoo Neighbor*. Others, however, penned poetry in private correspondence and personal diaries. They wrote of revelations, restored scriptures, prophecies, temples, and their testimonies of Jesus Christ. To these faithful psalmists, their religion served as a ready muse for novel poetry. *Psalms of Nauvoo: Early Mormon Poetry* is a narrative collection of these poems.

The volume opens with the Mormon exodus from Missouri and ends with the Saints' farewell to Nauvoo as they faced an uncertain future in the American West. Our purpose in contextualizing and publishing these poems is to provide a glimpse into the culture, life circumstances, religious heritage, and espoused doctrines of those early Latter-day Saints; hopefully by doing so we offer readers the chance to also catch "the swift thought of God" as the poets penned it.