

# The B. H. Roberts Papers at the University of Utah

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IN THE SPRING 1969 ISSUE OF *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* appeared Leonard Arrington's article, "The Intellectual Traditions of the Latter-day Saints," based partly on a questionnaire he had sent to "50 prominent LDS intellectuals." "I asked them to list the five most eminent intellectuals in Mormon history," Arrington wrote but told them not to include physical scientists and not to vote for themselves. Thirty-eight of the fifty "intellectuals" responded with their selections. Leading the list of those most frequently nominated were, in order: B. H. Roberts, Orson Pratt, Joseph Smith, Sterling McMurrin, and James E. Talmage.

Since this listing in 1969, the year I assumed the position of Curator of Western Americana and University of Utah Archivist, I determined to collect books, manuscripts, and ephemera associated with these "intellectuals." The Marriott Library Special Collections policy was to acquire everything possible on Utah, the Mormons, and the West. So when an opportunity arose to acquire the writings of these men, I worked to obtain everything and anything I could. Most of the publications of these men were already in the library's Special Collections. In addition we had significant manuscript items of some of them including holograph correspondence and an original manuscript page of the Book of Mormon, which was removed from the cornerstone of the Nauvoo House by Lewis Bidemon.

We collected all of B. H. Roberts's published works, including Mervin B. Hogan's "A Parallel: A Matter of Chance vs. Coincidence," published in the *Rocky Mountain Mason*, January 1956. This article was based on a speech showing a parallel between the Book of Mormon and Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* given to the Timpanogas Club by Ben E. Roberts, son of B. H. Roberts. I subsequently was informed that Ben Roberts's son, Brigham E. Roberts, had his father's speech and a manuscript study of the Book of Mormon by his grandfather, B. H. Roberts. Sterling McMurrin, an acquaintance of Brigham E. Roberts, had been shown B. H. Roberts's manuscript

on the "Studies of the Book of Mormon." Since Brigham E. Roberts wanted the manuscript made available to scholars, McMurrin suggested that the University of Utah library was the appropriate depository for such an important document.

Through McMurrin's influence, I was able to meet with Brigham E. Roberts, who was amenable to the transfer of his grandfather's manuscript to the University of Utah library. However, when I went to pick up the manuscript, we discovered that one section of the study was missing, so Brigham Roberts delayed the transfer until he could add the missing pages to the document. Unfortunately, this took longer than anticipated, and Mr. Roberts died before we obtained the much desired study.

Meanwhile another member of the Roberts family had been in contact with McMurrin who again recommended that the B. H. Roberts papers in her possession be placed in the university library. A meeting was arranged with Adele W. Parkinson, widow of Wood R. Worsley, grandson of B. H. Roberts.

Subsequently on 27 December 1979, Mrs. Parkinson gave the University of Utah library significant B. H. Roberts papers. This was an eleemosynary, inter vivos gift, which assigned to the University of Utah all rights (including rights of publication) to all items in the collection consisting of: correspondence of B. H. Roberts pertaining to the Book of Mormon and typescripts (original and carbon copies with hand-written emendations) of the "Book of Mormon Difficulties—A Study," the "A Book of Mormon Study," and the "A Parallel Book of Mormon (1830)—View of the Hebrews (1823-5)."

Shortly after this transaction the widow of Brigham E. Roberts, Virginia D. Roberts, gave the university library additional B. H. Roberts manuscripts consisting of correspondence, additional copies of Roberts's "Book of Mormon Studies," a photocopy of B. H. Roberts's copy of Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* containing marginal notes by Roberts, and the original ribbon copy of B. H. Roberts's autobiography. Subsequently, B. H. Roberts's copy of the Ethan Smith book was given to the Marriott Library by Virginia Roberts and her son Thom.

Once again the gift transferred literary rights to the university. Furthermore to carry out her husband's wishes to see that this material was made available to scholars, Mrs. Roberts gave a sizable amount of money to aid with processing the collection and making it available for research.

The availability of the Roberts correspondence and studies allowed many scholars to use the collection and some urged its publication. Foremost among these were George D. Smith, Allen D. Roberts, and Wallace Cooper. Messrs. Roberts and Cooper hired a secretary to type the entire manuscript and collate the various revisions that were now in the possession of the Marriott Library. Mr. Smith not only urged publication but

encouraged several respected Mormon historians to undertake the editing of the Book of Mormon study.

Aware that the University of Illinois Press had published several Mormon monographs, I contacted the assistant director of the press, Elizabeth Dulaney, who showed an interest if we could obtain a recognized scholar to edit the manuscript. Sterling McMurrin had already agreed to write a brief biographical sketch for an edited volume of the Book of Mormon study. Our problem was finding a qualified editor. It was then that Brigham D. Madsen stepped forward to take on the monumental task of turning the B. H. Roberts study into a publishable manuscript. With his usual careful research and writing, Madsen went to work and a manuscript was finally presented to the University of Illinois Press, where it passed the scrutiny of two prominent scholars of Mormon literature. Scott G. Kenney compiled an index, and in 1985 despite the protest of two Brigham Young University professors to the University of Illinois Press, B. H. Roberts's *Studies of the Book of Mormon* appeared.

The initial printing was 1,500 copies. Soon after a negative review of the Roberts book appeared in the "Church News" section of the *Deseret News*, the edition sold out and a second printing was published. With steady sales over the next two years, the second printing was sold and a third printing appeared the following year. Royalties of more than \$4,000 have been paid to the Marriott Library and will be used to fund future publications or acquisitions of other significant manuscripts. (The editors chose not to accept any money for their work.) A trade paperback edition of the work, which allowed Madsen to correct some minor errors, was published by Signature Books of Salt Lake City in 1992.

For the success of this publishing venture, many persons are responsible and deserving of thanks. Foremost are the donors Virginia Roberts and her son Thom and Adele Worsley Parkinson. Others are biographer and editor Sterling M. McMurrin and Brigham D. Madsen, George D. Smith, Allen Roberts, Wallace Cooper, Margery Ward, Elizabeth Dulaney, and Scott Kenney.