

REVIEWS

Worth the Wait

Reviewed by Jonathan A. Stapley

Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds. *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, in THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPERS, Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, general eds. Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008. xlvii + 506 pp. Cloth: \$49.95. ISBN: 978–1570088490.

Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds. *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843*, in THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPERS, Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, general eds. Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2011. xl + 558 pp. Cloth: \$54.95. ISBN: 978–1–60908–737–1.

I am a relative newcomer to the academic side of Mormon history. I never traded photocopies of photocopies of historical documents. I only know of the most scandalous shenanigans in the field through my reading of secondary treatments such as Turley's *Victims*¹ and my own limited sleuthing of such primary sources as issues of the *Seventh East Press* and federal court records. I did start researching in the old LDS Church Archives on the first floor of the Church Office Building in 2006 and I have sometimes been denied access to materials requested, but I personally only know a field of increasing access, openness, and—as evidenced by the Joseph Smith Papers Project—institutional support.

Documents are the foundation of Mormon history. Sometimes the content of a historical document is so important or the demand is sufficient to warrant the distribution of simple or uncritical typescripts. I cannot imagine anyone arguing that the digital publication of Wilford Woodruff's diaries has not been tremendously beneficial to the field. Even documents with such sketchy provenance as the typescripts of William Clayton's and William Law's Nauvoo diaries, published by George D. Smith and Lyndon Cook, respectively, have merited the attention of every serious scholar who treats the period.² However, there has also been a chronic uncritical approach to documents generally, and

Mormon history publications are frequently saturated in references to typescripts of documents where a more careful analysis of the original document yields contradictory (or at least more complicated) information. I understand that such analyses are not always possible, but most of the time they are. The single greatest contribution of the Joseph Smith Papers Project will not be a particular volume published, but will be instead the unparalleled (though of course still imperfect) example of professional precision with which its editors analyze their material. If there is a golden age in Mormon history today, its root is (or must be) a new, robust source criticism, and the project is to be commended for its lead in that area.

While I have made use of and commented upon each volume in the Joseph Smith Papers Project as it has been released,³ in this review I focus upon aspects of the first two *Journals* volumes. Joseph Smith's journals are key documents to any approach to early Mormonism. Their textual and publication history alone is worth examination. They were first popularized by the apostle-historians of early Utah (and their scribal compatriots) as edited, redacted, and rewritten for the "History of Joseph Smith." Michael Marquart published an early transcript of the 1832–1839 journals⁴ and Scott Faulring used microfilm images to produce his useful one-volume edition of all of Joseph Smith's journals besides "The Book of the Law of the Lord."⁵ Dean Jessee's incipient *Papers of Joseph Smith*, Volume 2, included Joseph Smith's journals through 1842.⁶ In 2002, the LDS Church History Department published digital images of the manuscripts of his journals, as well as other important collections.⁷ To date, the Joseph Smith Papers Project has published two volumes of Smith's journals: *Volume 1: 1832–1839* (J1) and *Volume 2: 1841–1843* (J2). Even with the documents readily accessible to scholars, and transcripts available, the volumes themselves are nevertheless profoundly significant.

The documents are presented in a manner that illustrates the critical approach of the editors as well as the desire to contextualize both them and their content. Moreover, the volumes are presented in a manner to maximize the ease of access to the material for those not intimately familiar with early Mormon history. The documents have more to reveal than the words inscribed on

them, though the project's high standard of document transcription has resulted in significant improvements over previously available material. The annotation is extremely helpful and the foreword and back matter integrate the content of the volume for the expert and uninitiated alike.

The project's documents-focused approach has, for example, yielded new insights into the early Mormon impulse to create cosmic records that span heaven and earth. "The Book of the Law of the Lord," excerpts of which are included in *Journals 2*, is a prominent example of this. This volume is particularly interesting as it served as a sort of cosmic record in explicit recapitulation of the Dueteronomists' Book of the Law of God. It fulfilled the commandment to keep a record for heaven and earth. Its "sacred pages" (J2, 117) comprised a handful of revelations and journal entries kept by recorder-scribes (one of whom was Eliza R. Snow) punctuated with grand testaments to faithful people close to the prophet. It was also the ur-ledger for consecration and tithing.⁸ "The Book of the Law of the Lord," like a few documents included in virtually every one of the project's volumes, has long been in the custody of the First Presidency.⁹ That the First Presidency has released important materials to the project is a hopeful signal of openness and a confidence that accurate analysis of such items strengthens the Church.

One of the lasting contributions of the project generally will be its highly meticulous transcription process. The following are several examples of such improvements in *Journals 1* over previously published editions:

- The entry for November 29, 1832, initially concluded with the personal and urgent words "the Lord spare me[.]" Smith then wrote "the" over "me" and added "life of the servant[.]" There are several similar revisions new to this edition that restore some of the original texture of the manuscript document.
- In comparing the first sentence of the final paragrah of November 8, 1835, *Journals 1* restores the original text, regarding "iniquities" of William Phelps, as opposed to the later Phelps-redacted "errors," a significant shift in tone.

- Six instances of adhesive wafer residue in the second Ohio journal indicate that material was copied into the journal from a loose manuscript temporarily fastened to the document. This seems to include the November 9, 1835, account of Smith's first vision of deity.
- Jessee's previous volume artificially broke up organic multi-date journal entries under editorial datelines for single dates. This can give the impression that things were written day by day.
- Previously, the handwriting from December 23, 1835 (J1, 88), to January 16, 1836 (J1, 122), had been identified as that of Frederick G. Williams. Editors have identified the text after December 26 as being in the handwriting of Warren Parrish.

In the case of Willard Richards's scribal materials available in J2, the improvement is particularly evident. There are sometimes examples of dramatic divergences from Faulring's edition, but even subtle improvements can be very important. For example, the March 2, 1842, entry documents a medical malpractice suit before the Mayoral Court. In one particular argument, *Journals 2* editors correctly render the name of a person used as a legal example as "Rush," where Faulring transcribed "Brink," the name of the defendant in the case. This correction markedly improves the coherence of the argument (281). In that same trial, *Journals 2* editors transcribe the judge's requirement for "virodirce [voire dire?]" instead of Faulring's "vis a vis" (282).

The Joseph Smith Papers Project volumes are closer to a diplomatic transcription than most published editions. The results of this presentation approach are readily observed in Richards's January 5, 1843, report of Judge Pope's extradition ruling, which is particularly abbreviated. Judge Pope published his ruling, and may have referred to these notes (J2, Appendix I, 394). Faulring reproduced large swaths of the published ruling in his transcript of the entry, more than tripling the text in some sections, and organized the material into paragraphs. *Journals 2*, by contrast, reproduces only Richards's entry (note that here again, there are important divergences from Faulring's transcript). While appear-

ing more broken or disjointed, and perhaps more difficult to follow, the new volume allows readers to approach the original text instead of an interpretation of it.

The scope of annotation is bound to be a locus of disagreement among reasonable readers. In my opinion, frequently the editors' annotation is exemplary. For example, the 1839 diary is sparse, but the annotation brings tremendous insight and cohesion to the narrative. Regarding *Journals 2*, the amount of extant records documenting events in Nauvoo is orders of magnitude over those sources for the earliest years of the Church, and the editors consistently and meticulously explicate the legal and financial context for the often sparse entries. They have ferreted out the most obscure references to people and places. In contrast, the editors are frequently not generous when presenting items of liturgical, theological, or religious significance.¹⁰ In both volumes, biblical allusions are generally but not always indicated. And while I understand the desire to focus on primary documents for context, sometimes the events are so complicated or heavy that readers not familiar with the secondary literature will simply miss enormous chunks of Smith's life just under the surface of the entries. Only rarely do the annotations seem out of place.

A particularly important and intriguing aspect of the editors' annotation of the second volume is the frequent reference to, and summation or reproduction of, several items long unavailable to researchers. The William Clayton journal is often quoted and cited and is particularly important to documenting Smith's life (see especially the April 1–4, 1843, entries excerpted in J2, Appendix II). The Nauvoo Quorum of the Twelve minutes are also a frequent referent, as well as the Nauvoo High Council minutes. As a researcher, I hope that the incorporation of these sources into published volumes, as with the material from the First Presidency's holdings, is indicative of future accessibility.

Over twenty years ago Dean Jessee published the second volume of the *Papers of Joseph Smith*—Smith's journals up through 1842. The final year and a half was to be next. With the publication of the Joseph Smith Papers Project's first two *Journals* volumes we have the journals through the first four months of 1843; we have a few more years to wait for the last fifteen months. Yet we have them and it has been worth the wait. In two decades we have

seen the complete reconceptualization of the Joseph Smith Papers Project and a level of professionalized precision that flirts with the incredible. The volumes include generous reference materials documenting civil and religious leadership, biographical details, and local cartography. *Journals 1* and *Journals 2* are also important documents themselves; a critical evaluation of them suggests that their creation came during a time quite different from when editors prepared previous transcripts. They are also a call to all researchers and authors in Mormon history to hone their craft in the creation of a more analytically robust and accurate future.

Notes

1. Richard E. Turley Jr., *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

2. The lack of acknowledgement of their problematic nature is a significant failure of these publications. Publications offering less than critical approaches to the documents should certainly disclose it as well as consciously grapple with what that means for readers and researchers.

3. My reviews are available online at *By Common Consent* (<http://bycommonconsent.com/joseph-smith-papers-project-volume-reviews/>).

4. Michael H. Marquardt, *Joseph Smith's 1832–34 Diary* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1979); *Joseph Smith's 1835–36 Diary* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1979); *Joseph Smith's 1838–39 Diaries* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm, 1982).

5. Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989).

6. Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith, Volume 2: Journals, 1832–1842* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

7. Richard E. Turley, ed., *Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2 vols., DVD (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, [2002], Vol. 1, Disk #20).

8. Earlier, in 1834, both Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery pestered John Whitmer to create the “Book of Remembrance” another reification of ancient chronicle. That same year, Cowdery began a narrative history apparently on behalf of the Presidency that was also to perhaps serve as such a record (H1, 26–28).

9. The most complete discussion of the “First Presidency’s vault” to date, including some of the spurious claims associated with it, is Turley, *Victims*, index: “First Presidency—vault.” See also JSP, J2, 5 note 8; JSP,

R1, 5 note 6; Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836* (Provo: BYU Studies/Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994), xiii.

10. E.g., a quick review of the religious significance of perihelia would have been helpful to many readers of J2, 314–17. It is also unfortunate that only baptism for the dead is emphasized though it was one of three baptismal rituals performed in the temple font.

Odysseus in the Underworld

Samuel Morris Brown. *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. xii + 392 pp., notes, index. ISBN 978–0–19–979357–0.

Reviewed by Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp

In a remarkably deft work of scholarship, Samuel Morris Brown offers a rich and compelling view of early Mormonism's sacramental and theological emergence up to the death of Joseph Smith Jr. This book makes many outstanding contributions to discussions of this foundational period, interventions that extend well beyond the stated framing device of conquering death.

The first half of the book sticks to this theme, reading the rise of Mormon beliefs and practices through the lens of the antebellum "death culture." Brown surveys the ways in which the ubiquitous fact of death and the desire to mitigate its psychic effects shaped all aspects of American life. This was particularly true in frontier communities, where enormous death tolls touched everyone. In this context, Brown explains worries surrounding the material degeneration of the corpse, grave relics, treasure seeking, a preoccupation with the interment of ancient peoples in the earth, and the embrace of seerhood as means by which Joseph Smith Jr. and his followers wrestled with the reality of death and sought to overcome it. The second half explores the various sacramental and theological elements of the community Smith created before his death in 1844 as responses to the desire to conquer death. In viewing Mormon sacramental theology through the lens of death, Brown leads the reader through many of the central and most