

shaped relations with Native people, and how violence and political conflicts reverberated in the lives of those sheltered in the “mansions” of Salt Lake City as well as those directly in harm’s way.

In *Sally in Three Worlds*, Virginia Kerns has provided an overview of nineteenth-century Utah Territory that foregrounds Native American people, and that is a significant accomplishment. It is valuable to read this oft-told story from an unexpected perspective, despite the limitations imposed by the sources. While readers may not truly get to *know* Sally, they will learn everything it is possible to know *about* her. And they will get a very good sense of the worlds that she inhabited.

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## Joseph Smith’s History: It’s Complicated

Ronald O. Barney. *Joseph Smith: History, Methods, and Memory*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020. 423 pp. Paper: \$40.00. ISBN: 978-1607817550.

*Reviewed by Samuel B. Hislop*

Joseph Smith defined truth as a “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24, emphasis added).

I remember well the first time I learned that I did not know nearly as much as I thought I did about things “as they were” in the life of the prophet. In October 2017, I was writing a piece for the Church’s

Communication Department about how the faith promotes an expansive vision of truth. Our managing director at the time, Rick Turley, reviewed my writing and told me that two of the quotations I had attributed to Joseph Smith would likely not survive historical scrutiny. For example, you will not find the famous line “by proving contraries, truth is made manifest” anywhere in the Joseph Smith Papers.

Rick, perhaps the world’s foremost living authority on Church history, directed me to a contact in the Church History Department who seconded his assessment. This good man pointed me to original source documents in the Joseph Smith Papers (something I had never paid much attention to) for more accurate quotations, both of which were significantly different from what I had.

At that time, I had worked for the Church for seven years and had been connected to the faith since the day I was born. But I had no idea that early leaders who helped compile the history of the Church, such as B. H. Roberts, sometimes took liberties in changing what the record shows the prophet said. This piqued my curiosity: *What else that I think I know about Joseph Smith was altered by others?* Rick later helped me understand (as the introductions in the Histories volumes of the Joseph Smith Papers make clear) the many layers that Joseph Smith’s words have been through over the years. From then until now, I have become a diligent student of the Joseph Smith Papers and other learnings from the life of the prophet.

A recent addition to that scholarship—and one that speaks directly to my experience—is Ronald O. Barney’s *Joseph Smith: History, Methods, and Memory*. Barney presents the serious student of Joseph Smith with a handbook of sorts to better study and understand the prophet—and to start or resume that journey with lessons like the one Rick and other Church history experts have taught me.

Barney covers the waterfront of important issues, giving the reader a compendium of some of the most important findings to date about Joseph Smith. He provides a primer on the basics of historiography. He summarizes the contextual background of Joseph Smith’s time, the

foundational experiences for Joseph and his Church, and how the history shows Joseph as both man and prophet.

Barney's book is an invitation into epistemological modesty and honest inquiry. "Frankly, we don't know as much as we think we know" about the life of Joseph Smith, he tells us. "It is probably safe to say that most Latter-day Saints don't want to read about the sometimes crooked though progressive course of the faith with its warts and all. Yet it is in the course correction, the stumbling while climbing, along with the remarkable successes portrayed in the historical record that Joseph Smith in his unsanitized appearance is best understood" (30–31).

Barney warns us of the absence of a complete documentary record of Joseph Smith's life—especially his inner life. Though the voluminous output of the Joseph Smith Papers seems to indicate otherwise, Barney tells readers of previous scholarship from Dean Jessee that shows that much of what we might assume to be Joseph Smith's thinking is in fact "the product of other men's minds"—namely, his scribes and clerks. "*We must face the reality that information about the most important feature of Joseph Smith's life may never have been created in the first place; what may be most useful to us totally eluded pen and paper altogether,*" Barney writes (52–53, emphasis in the original).

Even so, Barney encourages the student onward in honest and engaged study because that is the only path to understanding. Importantly, this is a path full of fascinating and joyful encounters. For example, in a chapter about the religious times of Joseph Smith, Barney helps students understand the importance of acknowledging Joseph Smith "as an engaging and imaginative prophet who drew from not only Deity and his instincts but also the world in which he lived." This is important to grasp, Barney writes, because it "better fits the biblical model of ancient Israel's prophetic figures and shows his prescient instincts of 'religion making'" (104).

In a section about Joseph Smith's character, Barney calls out one of the many comments from the prophet that give a glimpse of his large-heartedness toward the Saints and the outside world. Joseph had the

following published in response to a man asking “what is required to constitute good membership” in the Church:

Respecting how much a man of property shall give annually, we have no special instructions to give; He is to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, whether in this church, or any other church, or in no church at all, wherever he find them, to believe and obey all that God has revealed, does reveal, or will reveal, to do good and all men, to be a member in good standing in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (314)

The same chapter shows Joseph’s rougher side, including a story his nephew Joseph F. Smith told in 1894. Toward the end of March 1843, Joseph F. said, he was playing near the prophet’s home, “when all of a sudden the door flew open and I looked, and there came a great, big man right off the end of Joseph Smith’s foot, and he lit on the sidewalk just by the gate.” The man on the other end of the boot, Joseph F. said, was insulting the prophet in his own house. Recognizing that some would be shocked to hear of a prophet exhibiting such brutality, Joseph F. responds: “There was never a moment of [Joseph’s] life that he was free from such things as these, being hounded, and abused, and insulted by wicked men. . . . [He would have been] less a man if he had not kicked [the man] out of his house on that day” (316–17).

Anyone concerned about truth as Joseph Smith defined it must not ignore things “as they were” in his life, no matter how unflattering. This truth will, among other things, set us free from the prison of unrealistic expectations too many continue to have for prophets—and for ourselves. This book is written by an academic for academics and comes at the steep price of \$40. But it is an invaluable resource for anyone seeking to know, to the extent possible, more of the truth of this nineteenth-century faith leader.

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