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Mormon Americana at the Huntington Library

Peter Crawley

One of the most magnificent collections of books and manuscripts pertaining to English and American history and literature is housed in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, a privately endowed institution in San Marino, California that, in addition to the library, includes an art gallery specializing in eighteenth century British painting and extensive botanical gardens. The Library is primarily for scholarly research; its holdings are available to qualified scholars, but not for genealogical purposes.

The Mormon collection, a part of a vast assemblage of books and manuscripts relating to the American West, really began to grow with the purchase of the John D. Lee diaries in 1929. Since then the Library has vigorously acquired Mormon material, particularly that dealing with the Utah Church because of its involvement in Western history.

The guiding spirit behind the Mormon collection has been Leslie E. Bliss, formerly the librarian and more recently field representative for the Library until he retired two years ago. All who have searched the Intermountain West for Mormon Americana know well Leslie Bliss' skill as a book hunter. Ten years ago, for example, Mr. Bliss sniffed out a collection of more than 15,000 books and periodicals dealing with the Mormons that was stored in a sodhouse outside of Ogden, and succeeded in coaxing the entire lot to San Marino. This single acquisition provided many of the Huntington's most important Mormon books, and subsequently its cost was almost completely recovered from the sale of the duplicates! (The collector can recognize a duplicate from this collection by the "N" penciled on the flyleaf or title page of the book.)

A first edition of the *Book of Mormon* with the four-page index and Henry Wagner's copy of the *Book of Commandments* (1833) appear in the Huntington's extensive collection of editions of the "standard works" that includes virtually all of the major editions. The Library has complete sets of the principal pre-Utah periodicals, in the originals, highlighted by one of two known complete files of the Independence edition of *The Evening and the Morning Star*. Utah era newspapers include substantial files of the *Deseret News*, *The Mountaineer* and *The Mormon*, as well as complete files of the more common periodicals such as the *Millennial Star* and *Journal of Discourses*. As a general rule, almost all of the important periodicals relating to the Utah Church are available either in the original or on microfilm. And although the Huntington is strongest in materials related to Utah Mormonism, there are noteworthy items pertaining to other restoration churches, e.g. the only known complete file of the Brewsterite *The Olive Branch*.

The Library advertises that in the field of Western Americana it "has the great majority of all the rare books needed for research purposes"; and this probably remains true when specialized to the Mormons. The connoisseur of rare Mormoniana delights in finding among the Huntington holdings such items as John Taylor's *A short account of the murders, robberies [!], burnings, thefts, and outrages committed . . . upon the Latter Day Saints . . .* [Springfield, 1839]; Robert B. Thompson's *Journal of Heber C. Kimball . . .* (Nauvoo, 1840); *Mormonism dissected, or, knavery "on two sticks," . . .* (Bethania, Pa., 1841); E. G. Lee's *The Mormons, or, knavery exposed . . .* (Frankford, Pa., 1841); Parley P. Pratt's *An appeal to the inhabitants of the state of New York . . .* (Nauvoo, 1844); *Correspondence between Joseph Smith, the prophet, and Col. John Wentworth . . .* (New York, 1844); *Americans, read!!! Gen. Joseph Smith's views of the powers and policy of the government of the United States . . .* (New York, 1844); George T.M. Davis' *An authentic account of the massacre of Joseph Smith . . .* (St. Louis, 1844); Joseph H. Jackson's *The adventures and experiences of Joseph H. Jackson; disclosing the depths of Mormon villany [!] practiced in Nauvoo* (Warsaw, 1846); William Clayton's *The Latter-day Saints' emigrants' guide . . .* (St. Louis, 1848); Catherine Lewis' *Narrative of some of the proceedings of the Mormons . . . the mode of endowment, plurality of wives, &c, &c* (Linn, Mass., 1848); *Constitution of the State of Deseret . . .* (Kanesville, 1849); and Parley P. Pratt's *Proclamation extraordinary! To the Spanish Americans . . .* (San Francisco, 1852).

Among the original manuscripts are a group of Lewis C. and Emma Smith Bidamon papers, a Henry W. Bigler journal, the Jacob Boreman papers, the Oliver Cowdery letterbook, Oliver Cowdery's justice of the peace docket, a group of William H. Dame papers, the Lee diaries and letters, a diary of Rachel Lee, the transcripts of the trials of John D. Lee, the pleadings in two Jackson County damage suits brought by Edward Partridge and W.W. Phelps, "The Original Reed Peck Manuscript," Eliza R. Snow's overland diaries, and letters of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and other Church leaders.

Of perhaps greater value for the research historian is the Huntington Library's collection of photostats, microfilms and typescripts of Mormon

diaries and journals, the finest such collection outside of Utah. Here some one hundred and forty diaries and journals are collected, including those of Christopher J. Arthur, Joseph S. Black, James G. Bleak, George W. Brimhall, Lorenzo Brown, Archibald Gardner, Isaac C. Haight, Thales Haskell, Jacob Hamblin, Joseph L. Heywood, Norton Jacob, Thomas L. Kane, George Laub, David Lewis, Amasa Lyman, Wandle Mace, John D. T. McAllister, Priddy Meeks, Reuben Miller, L. John Nuttall, James Pace, Addison Pratt, John Pulsipher, Samuel W. Richards, Eliza Partridge Smith Lyman, George A. Smith, Erastus Snow, Allen J. Stout, Hosea Stout, Charles L. Walker and John M. Whitaker. Again the bulk of this material deals with the Utah period.

All in all, the Huntington Library's Mormon collection is one of a half dozen great such collections, and any serious study of the Mormons, particularly in Utah, should involve its holdings. The Library is open for research purposes throughout the year, six days a week. Those wishing to use it should apply for a reader's card by writing to: Head, Department of Reader Services, Huntington Library, San Marino, California 91108.

