
Editor's Introduction

As Lucy Smith lovingly gazed upon the newborn baby cradled in her arms, neither she nor her husband could have imagined the immense impact this innocent new arrival would have on the future of religion in America and the world. No family member could anticipate the heights of joy and the depths of tragedy the next thirty-eight years would bring as this boy grew into a man who selflessly fulfilled his prophetic mission to restore the word and will of God to His people. But on that cold, dark night of 23 December 1805, the warm glow of happiness reigned in the Smith household.¹

The bicentennial year of Joseph Smith's birth has brought about a flurry of new books, articles, documentaries, symposiums, and programs during 2005. With this issue, we, at *Mormon Historical Studies*, also wish to pay tribute to him and his life.

We begin with a look at the early Smiths of Topsfield, Massachusetts, where five generations of Joseph's ancestors, including his father, Joseph Smith Sr., lived and farmed. On 15 October 2005, historical markers were placed in Topsfield at the Topsfield Congregational Church and at the former homestead of the Smith family. These were placed under the direction of Mormon Historic Sites Foundation and Topsfield Historical Society. Joseph Fielding McConkie gives the background of the ancestral Smith families in an address he gave at the dedication of the markers. Kim Wilson, chairman of Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, adds further information about the placement and dedication of the monuments.

Two papers give information on the birthplace home of Joseph Smith. Authors T. Michael Smith, Kirk B. Henriksen, and Donald L. Enders, researchers in the LDS Church Historical Department Research and Development Division, conducted an extensive study of the original Solomon Mack and Joseph Smith Sr. Sharon/Royalton Township home and farm. The authors provide significant new historical and archaeological information, not only about the 1805 home and property, but also extensive information about the Memorial Cottage built under the direction of Junius F. Wells in 1905. The second paper, by Keith A. Erekson,

outlines the progressive steps taken to commemorate the birthplace of Joseph at the Vermont farm of Joseph's grandparents, Solomon and Lucy Mack. As Erektion states, the farm became the Church's first historic property designed to have visitors. Prior to acquiring the land, it owned only two other historic sites.

David J. Whittaker discusses how Joseph Smith acquired the plates and translated the Book of Mormon. He then details the history of printing this important book and gives a description of each edition or impression. In a similar vein, Robert J. Woodford writes about the process used by Joseph to receive revelations. He then describes the method of recording, copying, compiling, and preparing the revelations for publication. He finishes his article with information about the ongoing project of editing the Joseph Smith Papers, which will allow people all over the world the opportunity to know more about the first prophet called in this dispensation.

Carma de Jong Anderson, a noted Mormon costumer, provides an interesting and informative essay describing the styles of clothing worn by men, women, and children in Joseph Smith's day. During the latter part of 2005, Anderson created an exhibit in the Joseph Smith Building on the BYU campus showing the various types and patterns of clothing Latter-day Saints were accustomed to. The exhibit was viewed by thousands of visitors and received wonderful reviews for its historical accuracy and authenticity.

An interesting, albeit negative account of Joseph Smith and the city of Nauvoo was located and transcribed by William G. Hartley. In 1854, journalist Edmund Flagg wrote a ten-page essay entitled, "Nauvoo." The essay was based on two visits he made to Nauvoo, one in 1840, and one in 1844, when he was the editor of the *St. Louis Evening Gazette*. During his 1844 visit, Flagg personally interviewed Joseph Smith. His essay was published in a two-volume descriptive book, *The United States Illustrated*. Although he was very critical in his comments about Mormonism and its leader, his first-hand account is an important resource to researchers of the Nauvoo period.

Joseph D. Johnston adds more information about Joseph during his Nauvoo years. Johnston writes about Joseph's tomb, which was to have been the burial place of the Prophet and his family. He details four possible locations for the tomb as researched by others, then gives concrete information through primary sources and pictures for his suggestion as to the location.

In 2005, as the two-hundredth anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth approached, Latter-day Saints living in New York City began making

plans to erect a statue of the Mormon leader in “the Big Apple.” Claudia L. Bushman became involved in planning and carrying out this project. Through her eyes, she provides our readers with a touching essay describing the problems and resolutions she faced with each step leading to the erection of a beautiful bronze sculpture of the Prophet. Even the last, bittersweet conflict was resolved in a way not envisioned. But the story is still ongoing. The statue’s placement is only temporary, and a permanent location is being searched out.

Keeping with the tradition of interviewing historians for the journal, this issue looks at the life of Kenneth W. Godfrey. He is well-known as one of the early researchers of Nauvoo history and pioneer women’s voices. The interview, by his son Matthew C. Godfrey, gives an interesting account of how Kenneth, a farm boy from a small town in Cache County in northern Utah, became a teacher and administrator in the Church Education System, and an active leader in the Mormon History Association.

Two very different books are reviewed in this issue on Joseph Smith. The first is the long awaited full-length biography by Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling, A Cultural Biography of Mormonism’s Founder*, reviewed by Thomas G. Alexander. In Alexander’s words, this “biography stands as a monumental achievement. [It] will undoubtedly stand as the premier work on the life of an extraordinary religious leader.” The other review, by Brian Q. Cannon, looks at Chad M. Orton and William W. Slaughter’s book, *Joseph Smith’s America: His Life and Times*. In contrast to the detailed biography of Richard Bushman, this delightful work is written more as a casual, relaxed book. It is full of wonderful illustrations in full color and narrative quotes. The author’s decision to create this book suggests that one cannot understand Joseph Smith without understanding the world in which he lived.

It is the hope of the *Mormon Historical Studies* board, that the contents of this issue will be a positive addition to the many tributes paid to Joseph Smith in 2005.

Maurine Carr Ward, editor

1. Chad M. Orton and William W. Slaughter, *Joseph Smith’s America: His Life and Times* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2005), 19.



*Joseph Smith Jr.
Engraving by Frederick W. Piercy.
Courtesy LDS Church Archives*