
Telling the Nauvoo Story

Kenneth W. Godfrey

Snow fell early in November 1955, bringing with it temperatures well below zero. Though the weather outside was frightful and there was no heat in my attic bedroom I, wrapped in quilts, read long into the night a book just published by a Salt Lake seminary teacher Carter E. Grant titled, *The Kingdom of God Restored*. History had been my favorite subject, even in grade school, but Grant's book seemed extraordinary in the way it brought the Mormon experience to life. His narrative, not only captivated me but also connected and made real events to which I had only been introduced as scattered pieces of some grand puzzle. The chapters Grant devoted to Nauvoo guided readers to a bend on the Mississippi where refugees from Missouri engaged in planning and building a city, a temporary Zion, a place for a new beginning.

Grant seemed to cover all the bases—the sickness, the healings, the mission of the Twelve to England, plural marriage, those extradition attempts, the coming of the endowment, the building of the temple, turning the key for (note the *for*, not *to*) women, the presidential campaign, the martyrdom—and, in summing up the Prophet's life, called him a literary scholar, whose "writings are in a class by themselves."¹ Grant even devoted a few pages to the history of Nauvoo after the death of Joseph, before most of the Saints

KENNETH W. GODFREY's interest in Nauvoo began as an undergraduate in College when he wrote a paper on the political philosophy of Joseph Smith. His Ph.D. Dissertation done at Brigham Young University was titled "The Causes of Mormon-Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois 1839-1846." He later published articles on Crime and Punishment in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith and the Masons, the Murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and his presidential address when he was President of the Mormon History Association was a call to write more social histories of the Mormon Kingdom on the Mississippi. Retired from the LDS Church Educational System, he lives in Logan, Utah.



Drawing of Nauvoo.
Courtesy of LDS Archives.

moved west, an aspect of Nauvoo's history often overlooked.

While Grant's book will never find a place on the shelf with the extraordinary histories of the Church, its prose, close attention to detail, and its portrayal of Joseph Smith and other church leaders mark it as a rather good way to introduce a young man to the Mormon past. Since that winter long ago when only occasionally a book devoted to Mormon history would be published, and rarer still one detailing the history of Nauvoo, we have reached a time when some believe no Nauvoo stone remains unturned and there are few if any events in the Latter-day Saint nineteenth century experience lying in unplowed soil.

But for many years the story of Nauvoo remained largely untold. Richard Poll reminded us in 1978 that when Leonard J. Arrington wrote, "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism in the Twentieth Century," which was published in the first issue of *Dialogue*, of the seventy-one listed dissertations only one had Nauvoo in the title. The books devoted to telling the Nauvoo story, such as B. H. Roberts, *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo*; and E. Cecil McGavin, *Nauvoo the Beautiful*, were found seriously flawed. Poll believed McGavin's history belonged to the faith promoting genre, and Roberts' was lacking in breath and scope because the "Mormon-gentile conflict [was] its central theme."² The first institutionally sponsored book, Poll believed, "to come to grips, even gingerly, with the complexities of Nauvoo," was James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard's book, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, with its ninety-two page narrative and extensive bibliography regarding Nauvoo.³ Ten years after Poll's article appeared, Glen Leonard himself wrote a long

essay titled, "Recent Writing on Mormon Nauvoo," in which he argued that "an important corrective to Mormon history, including Nauvoo's history, is being offered through studies in women's, ethnic, and social history."⁴ There were historians, Leonard believed, already walking in new historical forests and finding the foliage to their liking.

Again in 1990 Leonard published an article in the *Journal of Mormon History* titled, "Remembering Nauvoo: Historiographical Considerations," in which he called attention to four distinctive perceptions to examine Nauvoo's past. These were: (1) the remembered past by Nauvoo's residents in the form of reminiscence, (2) the reports and observations of those who visited or passed through Nauvoo, (3) the memorializations created by modern-day "celebrants" who visit Nauvoo to celebrate its past, and (4) the interpreters—those who emphasize the imaginative reconstruction to create historical fiction or poetry, or who seek a more direct, and some would say, impartial description of the past called history.⁵ Now twelve years after Leonard wrote, it seems appropriate to once again examine some of the histories of Nauvoo before calling attention to aspects of its story that have not been fully told.

Among the first serious attempts to understand the Latter-day Saint experience in Illinois was the analysis given by former Illinois governor Thomas Ford in his two-volume work entitled, *History of Illinois from Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847*.⁶ Ford believed Joseph Smith "ignorant of almost everything which belonged to science," but was a man possessing "natural cunning" and "power of invention," which more than made up for his deficiencies in education.⁷ His extreme youth, Ford wrote, "was spent in an idle, vagabond life, roaming the woods, dreaming of buried treasure, and exerting himself to learn the art of finding them by the twisting of a forked stick in his hands or by looking through enchanted stones." Then "Joe," as Ford called him, "was found by Sidney Rigdon" and the two devised "a new religion."⁸ Familiar with the 1835 account of the First Vision, Ford, showing little bias, recounts for his readers, Joseph Smith's initial encounter with God, the appearance of Moroni, and even calls the coming forth of the Book of Mormon a "story remarkably well gotten up."⁹ Ford then writes, though briefly, about the Mormon experience in Ohio and Missouri as prelude for the Saints' arrival in Illinois in 1839.¹⁰ Politics,¹¹ the Prophet's presidential campaign,¹² Joseph allowing himself to be crowned and anointed priest and king,¹³ plural marriage (which Ford calls "spiritual wives"),¹⁴ the destruction of the "heretical press,"¹⁵ the presence of Danites,¹⁶ and the idea that the "whole church was a community of murderers, thieves, robbers, and outlaws,"¹⁷ are all topics the governor treats. He writes, too, about the establishment of a bogus factory to manufacture counterfeit money,¹⁸ and



Original 1854 first edition (Volume I) of Thomas Ford's, History of Illinois. Ford devoted approximately one-fourth of the book (120 pages) to a discussion and history of the Mormons in Illinois. Photograph by Alexander L. Baugh, courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

the widely held belief that Hyrum Smith, “had offered a reward for the destruction of the press of the *Warsaw Signal*.”¹⁹ These events were all factors, he believed, in arousing a “popular fury” against the Mormons.²⁰ He also reveals that he intended to allow Joseph and Hyrum to escape from the Carthage Jail, believing that following Missouri’s example was the “best way of getting rid of the Mormons.”²¹ Justifying many of his own actions in his dealings with Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saints, Ford provides details that relate to many events prior to and after the murder of the Prophet and his brother.²²

There are moments in his history, though brief, when he attempts to be fair and appears to possess less rancor and hatred for Mormonism than many others who wrote about the Church in the nineteenth century. His account of the events and the people who forced the Latter-day Saint to move west in 1846 remains a valuable source for historians.²³ Ford’s history is important for being among the first to explicate some of the reasons for the conflicts in Hancock County during the 1840s. Still, in the main, his account of the Mormon sojourn in Illinois lacks balance and pays little attention to figures other than Joseph Smith, John C. Bennett, Brigham Young, and the leaders of the Anti-Mormon Party. His narrative is also weak in helping readers understand the Church and the appeal it had for converts.

Thomas Gregg, the Quaker newspaper man, magazine editor, sometimes poet, and writer, who was born and raised in Belmont, Ohio, in his 1880 book, *History of Hancock County*, claims that he had been, “utterly unable to obtain possession of *The Wasp*, the Nauvoo paper of that period [the 1840s],” so he could not give, “the Mormon side in the controversy.”²⁴ Gregg’s history of Nauvoo is perhaps most valuable for the documents published in toto that are relevant to his subject. The resolutions of the nine-county convention, sources pertaining to the battle of Nauvoo, the names of the grand jury and whom they indicted, and details regarding the leaders and motives of the anti-Mormons are all-important resources that have been used by historians to flesh out the history of Nauvoo. Gregg writes quite elegantly at times. For example, following his account of the martyrdom we read:

On the morning of the 28th of June, 1844, the sun rose on as strange a scene as the broad Hancock prairies had ever witnessed. At the three corners of a triangle, 18 miles asunder, stood a smitten city and two almost deserted villages, with here and there a group of questioning men, anxious to hear the news of the night. Toward the two villages the more courageous ones were returning to find their several abodes unsacked and untouched. The wet and heavy roads leading to the county seat from the south and east were being again traversed by the refugees of the night, now returning, and wondering that they had homes to return to. All know that a great crime has been committed, by whom they knew not; and they know not how, upon whom, where, or in what manner restitution might fall!²⁵

Gregg believed that those who assaulted the Carthage Jail were only bent on capturing Joseph Smith and turning him over to authorities from Missouri so he could be taken back there to stand trial for the old charges against him. Had they not met resistance at the jail door this is what would have happened and the lives of the two Mormon leaders would have been spared.²⁶ His arguments are difficult to believe given the fact that those who rushed the jail fired first and Hyrum was probably already dead before Joseph discharged his gun.²⁷

Gregg does tell the story of the battle for Nauvoo, providing readers with the non-Mormon spin on this encounter.²⁸ Concluding his account of Mormonism’s brief, tumultuous tragic stay in Hancock County, he asserts that Joseph Smith “was a very bad man” whose success lay in the men he drew around him, such as Sidney Rigdon, Parley P. Pratt, and Brigham Young. “Beyond these and around them, supporting, feeding, pampering, and ready to fight for them, rallied a host of others, of many grades of character, sincere, devout, ignorant, willing and unwilling dupes, to whose sustaining power the sect owes its life.”²⁹ Gregg’s biographer, John E. Hallwas writes:

His 136-page chapter on “The Mormon Period” is an outstanding section of the history. Although his conviction that Smith was a complete charlatan bars him from achieving much insight into the Prophet, his criticisms are sometimes penetrating, as when he discovers Mormon abuse of the power of habeas corpus and the destruction of the *Nauvoo Expositor*. He also recognizes the importance of the Nauvoo Charter in providing a civic system that could protect Smith from outside interference.”³⁰

Though flawed, Gregg’s history remains a valuable source for those who want to understand the Latter-day Saint Nauvoo experience.

Only eight years after the 1892 death of Thomas Gregg, Brigham Henry Roberts, an LDS Church general authority and arguably Mormonism’s leading nineteenth and early twentieth century historian, published, *The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo*. Roberts believed this book stood as a companion “in historical sequence” to his *The Missouri Persecutions*.³¹ Better than most, Roberts informs readers just why Nauvoo history is important for all those who want to understand Mormonism. He wrote:

It is worthy of the readers’ attention because the religious institution founded under God by this man [Joseph Smith]—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—survives him, and presents to the world the greatest religious wonder of the age, a right conception of which cannot be formed without a knowledge of this Nauvoo period of the history of The Church; a period which is essentially a formative one, especially in regard to what may be considered the higher and more complex doctrines of Mormonism. It was in Nauvoo that Joseph Smith reached the summit of his remarkable career. It was in Nauvoo he grew bolder in the proclamation of those doctrines which stamp Mormonism as the great religion of the age. It was in Nauvoo that Joseph Smith’s life expanded into the eloquent fullness which gives so much promise of what man will be in eternity.³²

Glen Leonard characterizes Roberts’ book as a polemical work, and it can be successfully argued that Roberts views Nauvoo through the eyes of Joseph Smith, leaving readers not quite satisfied with the history they have been served. Like many who came after him, Roberts’ narrative emphasizes the purchase of land, the day of healing, the Prophet’s journey to Washington, D. C., the Nauvoo Charter, the Nauvoo Legion, and the martyrdom. While these and other major events are important, such heavy emphasis on them perhaps distorts the story of Nauvoo as experienced by the common folk. Occasionally, Roberts criticizes Joseph Smith, believing that the Prophet’s letters to potential presidential candidates were “unnecessarily harsh of expression,” and “certainly unworthy of him,”³³ criticisms that one would probably not find in the writings of a general authority today.

At times, Roberts is not afraid to journey beyond the evidence. He argues that the arrest of Joseph Smith in Dixon, “was part of a plot by the

Whig Party to win the Mormon vote.”³⁴ He also claims that Joseph Agnew set the fire that destroyed the Nauvoo Temple, a position that is arguable among historians today.³⁵ In the appendices, Roberts published the correspondence between Joseph Smith and the potential 1844 presidential candidates, the Prophet’s political platform, and John Taylor’s account of the martyrdom written at the request of George A. Smith and Willard Richards—all important documents relative to the Latter-day Saints’ Nauvoo experience. Much of Roberts’ book first appeared serialized in the mid-1880s in the Church’s magazine for young men, *The Contributor*. Later these articles were revised, expanded, and published as the book referred to above.³⁶

While there is much in the histories B. H. Roberts wrote that can be praised, some caution might also be advised. J. Reuben Clark once observed, “that Roberts’ historical writing was the work of an advocate and not of a judge, and you cannot always rely on what Brother Roberts says. Frequently, he started out apparently to establish a certain thesis and he took his facts to support his thesis, and if some facts got in the way it was too bad, and they were omitted.”³⁷ Doing much of his writing in the nineteenth century, Roberts, when judged against the standards of his day, is quite fair in his treatment of Nauvoo’s history. He does recognize weaknesses and imperfect conduct on the part of Mormons, something other Latter-day Saint historians and leaders have been reluctant to see.

Perhaps the most important contribution Roberts makes in his role as a Nauvoo historian relates to memory. As Glen Leonard wrote in 1990, “Our memories—not one but many and varied—have reflected who we were, when and where we lived, how we believed and what we wanted to remember, or to forget. The individual and collective memories of the City Beautiful do not present an objective recall of information. The formulation of a historical memory is instead more a subjective process.”³⁸

Partly because Roberts was one of the first Latter-day Saints to tell the story of Nauvoo, his words reflected who he thought we were, where we lived, and how we believed, and his portrait of the “City Beautiful” has greatly influenced how Latter-day Saints have perceived the experience of their Nauvoo forebears. In addition, Roberts formed the pattern that many historians followed as they composed their own books and articles.

Other authors, many of whom were non-Mormons, wrote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries about Nauvoo. In 1888, James Henry Kennedy published, *Early Days of Mormonism, Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo*.³⁹ George Q. Coray in 1904 wrote a master’s thesis at Columbia University titled, “The Mormon People,” which provided readers with some Nauvoo history.⁴⁰ William V. Pooley in his 1905 dissertation devoted a chap-

ter to the Mormons in Illinois.⁴¹ Theodore Calvin Pease in 1920 published, "The Mormon War," in a book celebrating the centennial history of Illinois.⁴² Ellen O. Carlson, studying at Northwestern University, wrote in 1925 a master's thesis titled, "The Latter-day Saints as a Factor in Illinois History."⁴³ Thomas Rees authored an article in 1928 titled, "Nauvoo, Illinois Under Mormon and Icarian Occupation," which provided readers with a brief account of the Mormon sojourn in Illinois.⁴⁴ Even as the depression deepened, Shirley N. McKean wrote her 1933 master's thesis on the Mormons in Nauvoo while a student at the State University of Iowa.⁴⁵ Francis Lester Bouquet took a different approach for his dissertation completed at Temple University in 1938, compiling original documents concerning the Nauvoo Mormon settlement.⁴⁶ Will and Katherine Griffith, at the beginning of WWII, published a book which contained descriptions of Nauvoo, its people and its history.⁴⁷ Rita Halford's 1945 master's thesis focused on Nauvoo's government and social institutions.⁴⁸ Some have called her study the best history of Nauvoo up to that point in time. Fawn Brodie, in her acclaimed and criticized biography of Joseph Smith first published in 1945, also treats the Prophet's Nauvoo experience.

In 1946, E. Cecil McGavin published his book, *Nauvoo the Beautiful*. McGavin, educated at Brigham Young University, the University of Utah, the University of Chicago, and Stanford, taught Seminary and also worked in the LDS Church Historian's Office. One historian labeled *Nauvoo the Beautiful* a "sentimental" recital,⁴⁹ and another, "romanticized and superficial."⁵⁰ McGavin's Nauvoo is three times the size of Chicago, where a thousand hammers clanged their melody of industry.⁵¹ Describing the scene just prior to the Prophet's final departure for Carthage, the author writes that even Old Major, the family dog, "knew that his master needed help." Then, turning to his trusted canine, with "unsteady lips and moist eyes . . . [Joseph] told Major that this was a day of sorrow long to be remembered."⁵² Writing more like a novelist than a historian, McGavin declares that Emma would, "never forget the haunting words her beloved companion whispered in her ear as he kissed her feverish cheek before he set out for Carthage,"⁵³ yet does not tell his readers the source of such intimate information. Still, McGavin might be the first Mormon writer to paint a sympathetic picture of Emma Smith, both before and after the exodus.

In the book's preface we read, "Hark to the tale of old Nauvoo, the city of the saints, the metropolis supplanting the mosquito-infested marshes, the city thrice Chicago's size at the time of the exodus, yet doomed to become a dwarfed and deserted village, its proud spirit dying when the bullet-riddled bodies of the martyrs were buried at midnight in a sacred tomb in the bosom of Nauvoo."⁵⁴ McGavin offered his history as a tribute to the great men and



Nauvoo Temple Block, 4 May 1907. The two-story Icarian schoolhouse was built with stones from the temple. Photo by George E. Anderson. Courtesy of LDS Church Archives.

women who built the Mormon city on the Mississippi. Yet, for the most part his story is the tale of Joseph Smith, his family, and the Prophet's encounters with Indian chiefs.⁵⁵ Perhaps the information most helpful for those who want to understand the story of Nauvoo is found in the chapters devoted to Joseph Smith's family and their fate following the Prophet's death.⁵⁶ These chapters represent his best work. While there is information of value in McGavin's book, it is a challenge to sift fact from fiction, and one can argue that his Nauvoo is too beautiful.

In 1955, George R. Gayler wrote an important dissertation while a student at Indiana University. He studied the social, economic, and political history of the Mormons in Illinois and called his work a re-evaluation.⁵⁷ Some historians believed Gayler's work a better history of the "City Beautiful" than those that had preceded it. Others were certain that better histories of Nauvoo could be written.

Keith Huntress, a professor at Iowa State University, in 1960 published, *Murder of an American Prophet*.⁵⁸ The work includes edited documents relating to the Mormon experience, including Joseph Smith's own story and his Wentworth Letter. Huntress argued that there is enormous drama in the murder of Joseph Smith. "The story," he writes, "has suspense—the might-have-beens of near escape, [and] the quiet interlude just before the mob broke out of 'the little patch of woods' and stormed the jail." It is possible,

he continues, “to read the story as true tragedy—one of the few in American history.”⁵⁹ Huntress’ book allowed researchers access to some of the primary sources (but not nearly enough) that historians use to tell the story of Nauvoo. Of the documents he edited, at least twenty-five of the thirty-seven come from anti-Mormons, and many had been published previously. Therefore, his book hardly has the depth and the balance we expect in good history.

Early in the 1960s, following the organization of Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated and the appointment of Dr. T. Edgar Lyon as the corporation’s historian, many believed that the true story of Mormon Nauvoo would soon be told. Furthermore, following the organization of the Mormon History Association in 1965, there was talk among scholars that a new Mormon history was ready to blossom.

When Robert Bruce Flanders’ book, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, was published in 1965 by a university press, Klaus J. Hansen in reviewing it for *Dialogue* wrote, “This book is indeed the definitive political and economic history of the Mormons in Illinois, superceding George R. Gayler’s rather superficial doctoral dissertation.” “Flanders’ work,” Hansen continued, “will be a major building block for whoever attempts the Herculean task of writing a much needed encyclopedic history of the Mormons in Illinois.” Flanders, Hansen believed, focused almost completely on Nauvoo “as a political, corporate kingdom of God, a kingdom that was not only *in* this world, but, in his opinion, very much *of* it.”⁶⁰ Hansen thought, too, that the book would alienate many Utah Mormons, although he believed they would be delighted that the author was convinced that Joseph Smith practiced plural marriage, introduced his followers to temple rites, and organized a political arm of the Church called the Council of Fifty.⁶¹ Flanders, in fact, wrote his book when interest in the newly discovered Council of the Kingdom of God was at its peak. Brigham Young University professors James R. Clark and Hyrum Andrus proclaimed the significance of this organization in books and articles and Hansen himself believed that all Mormon history would have to be rewritten now that the existence of this secret council had been proved to exist. However, a few years later, D. Michael Quinn and Andrew F. Ehat would revise the thesis of Hansen, Clark, and Andrus, significantly downplaying the Council of Fifty in Mormon history.

In the issue of *Dialogue* which followed the Hansen review, Professor Stanley B. Kimball, though not a Utah Mormon but an Illinois Saint, while praising Flanders as having “done what should have been done long ago—put some meat onto the skeletal history of the extremely interesting and important Illinois place of early Mormon history,” also argued that *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* was good political and economic history, but weak

in religious, social, and cultural history.⁶² Joseph Smith, Kimball believed, “suffers most from Flanders technique.” Flanders does not treat Joseph Smith as a “religious leader, but as a man of affairs.” “While Joseph Smith,” Kimball wrote, “is not exactly, the villain of Flanders’s book, the reader is never moved to sympathy. Nowhere does Joseph Smith appear kind, generous, or even likeable.”⁶³ In 1974 I delivered a paper, standing in a wagon box in front of Lucy Mack Smith’s Nauvoo home.⁶⁴ After finishing my remarks, Bob Flanders and I walked and talked to where lunch was being served. He said something like what follows. “Ken, I can tell from the way you write that you like Joseph Smith. I, in contrast, do not like him.” Kimball, in his review, picked up on this fact. While it is possible to write good history without having affection for that being written about, it is difficult to tell the story of Nauvoo while disliking Joseph Smith and portraying him strictly as a man of affairs. Joseph, himself, and his followers believed him to be primarily a religious leader, even a prophet of God.

Although *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* is not the definitive political and economic history of the Mormons in Illinois, it has been “a major building block” for historians since 1965. Richard Poll believed it to be “one of the ground breakers of the new school of Mormon history,” and called it not only “richly informative” but “a benchmark” as well.⁶⁵

It is difficult now, nearly forty years after Flanders’ book was published, to fully appreciate just how much the historical climate was changing. Let me illustrate. When my own article, “The Road to Carthage Led West,” appeared in the Winter 1968 issue of *BYU Studies*, T. Edgar Lyon, who we all believed had forgotten more about Nauvoo than the rest of us knew, asked Charles Tate the editor, how he had found the courage to publish it. Lyon told Tate that it was just the kind of article he would have wanted to write about Nauvoo, but did not think it would receive Church approval. Tate, if I have my facts straight, said that he had not asked permission, he just went ahead and published it. Shortly after the article appeared, I received a handwritten letter from Juanita Brooks who complimented me on it and then wondered how I, the director of the Stanford Institute, could make the admissions I had made, and still keep my job. Today what I wrote sounds quite tame, but that was then.

Six years after the appearance of *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi*, the fiction writer Samuel W. Taylor published *Nightfall at Nauvoo*.⁶⁶ Boasting a good bibliography of non-Mormon sources, Taylor’s book, Richard Cracroft writes, has well-paced narrative, “creates imagined conversations, packed with historical detail, which he puts into the mouths of his characters. The result is both irritating and entertaining, neither good fiction nor good history.”⁶⁷ Cracroft believed that Taylor’s book was actually more of a history of

polygamy and its role in the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith and the demise of Nauvoo. The book's conspiratorial tone, Cracroft argued, weakens Taylor as a historian and readers are often left wondering which parts are history and which are fiction. It might be doing a disservice to Taylor to include *Nightfall at Nauvoo* in a paper about historians and their histories, but in meetings of the Mormon History Association held in San Francisco in which Richard S. Sadler criticized the book's history, Taylor vigorously defended his novel for its historical accuracy. Taylor's position has been difficult to verify as Cracroft's review implies.

In the 1960s, University of Utah historian David E. Miller, at the request of the National Park Service and in connection with the Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated established in 1963, wrote a history of Nauvoo intended to serve both the Mormon and non-Mormon public. Later, with the assistance of his wife Della, the two shortened and revised the report and it was published in 1974 by Peregrine Smith under the title, *Nauvoo: The City of Joseph*.⁶⁸ In reviewing the book, Glen Leonard wrote, "it supplies newer information on land purchases and the operations of city government, plus descriptions of important landmarks now the object of historic restoration."⁶⁹ Though balanced in tone and fair in its analysis, Miller's volume falls far short of being the "much-needed encyclopedic history of the Mormons in Illinois that Hansen called for."⁷⁰

Carthage Conspiracy, written by Dallin H. Oaks, a lawyer, and Marvin S. Hill, a historian, represents the best of the new Mormon history. The writers examined the sources, those favorable to Joseph and Hyrum Smith, and those authored by non-Mormons who disliked the Latter-day Saint leaders, as well as sources that took a middle road. Their treatment of the trial of those indicted for the murder of Joseph Smith, placed in its historical setting, is not only thorough, but also balanced, and provides readers with insight into the martyrdom of the Smiths that renders the volume capable of standing on its own in any historical circle. Even after more than a quarter of a century it remains the best published treatment of the martyrdom.⁷¹

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, journal articles regarding the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo were published by the score. In 1988 when Glen Leonard wrote his article reviewing, "Recent Writing on Mormon Nauvoo," he commented that, "In recent years Nauvoo has been featured in thematic issues of several publications," including several issues of *BYU Studies*, the *Sperry Symposium*, the *Ensign*, and in *A New Light Breaks Forth: Essays in Mormon History*.⁷² The numerical total of journal articles compelled Leonard to group them together by themes such as Historic Sites, Biography, Joseph Smith, Smith's Family, Settlement History, Doctrinal Development, Temple Theology, Social History, Nauvoo Society, Political-



*Nauvoo from the flats, May 1907.
George E. Anderson Collection.
Courtesy LDS Church Archives.*

Economic, and Nauvoo Declension. Leonard's article cites more than two-hundred and thirty books, articles, dissertations, and theses that treated wholly or in part, some aspect of the Nauvoo experience. He called readers attention to a "Comprehensive synthesis activity under preparation," which he wrote, "will reflect the collaborative efforts of Glen M. Leonard and the late T. Edgar Lyon."⁷³ Though he found that the output of articles and books had addressed the "identified opportunities" suggested by Richard Poll ten years earlier, there were still some areas needing attention. There remained room, he said, "for various approaches to and perspective on the Nauvoo experience: Nauvoo society, Nauvoo religion, [and] Nauvoo politics," as well as the interrelationship between Nauvoo and other Mormon branches in Illinois and other parts of the United States. There were unexamined lives of important figures that should become the focus of serious study, as well as a serious analysis of the Nauvoo experience by literary, music, and art historians. Books on the Nauvoo society, the economy, and the full story of free masonry remained unwritten as well.⁷⁴

Histories that filled in the gaps Leonard mentions have since appeared. In 1990, a Virginia high school history teacher and bookstore owner, George

W. Givens, published his book, *In Old Nauvoo*.⁷⁵ Givens, who lived in Nauvoo several summers and served as the historian for Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated, treats such topics as “Pikes and Paths,” “Purse and Post,” “Crafts and Craftsmen,” “Recreation,” “Homes and Home Life,” “Courtship and Marriage,” as well as “Books and Libraries.” In Givens’ book we are introduced to a city and a people whose lives might have been centered in Joseph Smith and the gospel he restored, but who also constructed a city, made a living, raised children, coped with death and disease, found time to play, engaged in cultural events, read books, and tended gardens, while at the same time living with hatred, some violence, and public ridicule. We learn, moreover, that there is Nauvoo history that is not centered in politics, plural marriage, destruction of printing presses, and a presidential campaign. Givens’ volume, while less than three hundred pages, opens a window to Nauvoo history that, for the most part, had remained closed for 150 years. His book is a fine introduction into Nauvoo’s social history.

It has now been more than a decade since Leonard wrote his review. Since that time the scholarship regarding Nauvoo has not diminished, but has in fact increased. The 1991 winter/spring issue of *BYU Studies* focused on Nauvoo and included an article by President Gordon B. Hinckley who, less than a decade later, would announce the rebuilding of the Nauvoo Temple. Other articles include, Larry C. Porter and Milton V. Backman, “Doctrine and the Nauvoo Temple,” William G. Hartley, “Nauvoo Stake, Priesthood Quorums and the Church’s First Wards,” Bruce A. Van Orden, “William W. Phelps’s Service in Nauvoo as Joseph Smith’s Political Clerk,” William Mulder, “Nauvoo Observed,” Dennis Rowley, “The Mormon Experience in the Wisconsin Pineries, 1841-46,” Susan Sessions Rugh, “Conflict in the Countryside: The Mormon Settlement at Macedonia, Illinois,” E. Dale LeBaron, “Benjamin Franklin Johnson in Nauvoo,” Marshall Hamilton, “From Assassination to Expulsion: Two Years of destruction, Hostility, and Violence,” Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and T. Jeffrey Cottle, “The City of Joseph in Focus: The Use and Abuse of Historic Photographs,” Melinda Evans Jeffress, “Mapping Historic Nauvoo,” Frank W. Jackson, “Profiling Women in Nauvoo: An Essay in Black and White,” Richard G. Oman, “A View of Nauvoo,” and my own study, “Crime and Punishment in Mormon Nauvoo, 1839-1846.” These essays emphasize aspects of Nauvoo’s history and some of the people who made it that had for years remained shapeless, lying in dust in America’s archives.⁷⁶

Following the completion of her doctoral dissertation in 1979 at the University of Durham titled, “Mormonism in Illinois, 1839-1847: A Study of the Development of Socio- religious Conflict,” Annette P. Hampshire subsequently published two landmark articles regarding anti-Mormon senti-

ment in Illinois, and mobocracy in Hancock County. These articles established her as a leading scholar relative to the activities of non-Mormons in communities close to Nauvoo. Her studies appeared in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, *Western Illinois Regional Studies*.⁷⁷

While serving a mission with her husband who directed the LDS Visitors Center in Nauvoo, Janath R. Cannon, a former counselor in the General Relief Society Presidency, was prompted to write, *Nauvoo Panorama*. She wrote about Nauvoo before, during, and after its rise, fall, and restoration. A slim book of only 118 pages which contains scores of beautiful and sometimes rare pictures and maps, Cannon sought to provide readers with “the entire story of Nauvoo and the many peoples who made it beautiful.” While her treatment of the Icarians, Catholics, and the Protestants, and the return of the Mormons in the twentieth century is well written and details history often overlooked, the book is far too brief and readers only wish she had written more. What Cannon does write, however, is fair in its analysis, and is not a polemic treatment of the Mormon Nauvoo experience.⁷⁸

Carol Cornwall Madsen, a former associate director of the Women’s Research Institute at Brigham Young University, professor of history, and associate research professor in the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute, in 1994 published her book, *In Their Own Words, Women and the Story of Nauvoo*. Selecting excerpts from four diaries, twelve letters, and thirteen reminiscences, Madsen hoped to disclose these women’s lives, “as they perceived them to be brings woman’s experiences in from the edges of history, and enables us to bridge the silence that has separated us, as women, from our past.”⁷⁹ From a plethora of materials, Madsen chose documents for her book, “primarily for the range of experience they reflected and the different perspectives from which they were written.”⁸⁰ Fourteen of the women whose writings are included in the volume are wives of prominent church leaders, while ten are perhaps more “typical” Latter-day Saint women. Madsen’s book provided a glimpse into Nauvoo’s history that had been neglected and which too many in the past deemed unimportant.

Roger D. Launius and John E. Hallwas in 1995 published a document history of the Mormon War in Illinois, and titled their book, *Cultures in Conflict*.⁸¹ In his review of the book, Elden J. Watson wrote that *Cultures in Conflict* is “not your standard, ordinary, run-of-the-mill anti-Mormon book, but it is definitely an anti-Mormon book just the same.” Watson believed that Launius, a member of the Community of Christ Church and chief historian at NASA, and Hallwas, an English professor and director of regional collections at Western Illinois University, thought that they had compiled a volume, “impartial and unbiased,” which presented “both sides of the story.”

However, Watson insists that any book “might be called anti-Mormon that depicts the Prophet Joseph Smith as a liar, a thief, and a despot, while implying that Thomas Sharp was a “much admired champion of republican virtue.” Watson was troubled, too, that William Law and other men of questionable virtue, such as John C. Bennett, are called “some of the most solid and dignified men of the community.”⁸²

Launius and Hallwas, in contrast, are troubled when historians, “assume that the early church was led by divine revelation through Joseph Smith,” and fail to recognize that such an approach as an explanation of the Nauvoo past has serious limitations.⁸³ They believed they were making available documents that would assist in fleshing out aspects of the Mormon Nauvoo experience more secular than divine. Some readers like to have access to the materials historians use to write their histories and the authors believed they had published many such documents. Watson points out, however, that sixty documents are from non-Mormon sources and only thirty are from Mormon sources.”⁸⁴ This led him to conclude that the volume does not provide the balance we expect from good histories. Still, there are some documents, such as a previously unpublished account of the martyrdom written by Samuel Otho Williams, that “provides interesting detail from a non-Mormon perspective.”⁸⁵ The authors, too, Watson argues, have “Mormon aggression” as their thesis,⁸⁶ which is more than difficult to prove. *Cultures in Conflict*, while of some value for the documents it publishes, gives readers, Watson argued, a one-sided view of Mormon history that we have grown to expect from anti-Mormon writers. Kenneth H. Winn and D. Michael Quinn called *Cultures in Conflict*, “a fine documentary history” and “one of the most important documentary editions in decades.”⁸⁷ Quinn argued that each side of the conflict viewed itself as being on the side of virtue, and the book presents both sides. Discerning readers will probably find useful information in the Launius–Hallwas book.

In 1995, the Department of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University, published, as part of their regional studies series, a book devoted to the Mormon experience in Illinois. In this volume Roger K. Peterson examined, “Prophet’s Poets, and History: Dramatic Monologues of Nauvoo.” Gary Anderson wrote about “Almon W. Babbitt and the Golden Calf.” Susan Easton Black composed an essay on “Joseph Smith III and the ‘Lost Sheep,’” while Larry Dahl authored an essay titled “Doctrinal Teachings in Nauvoo.” Arnold K. Garr shed new light on Joseph Smith’s 1844 presidential campaign. The book, as a whole, examined aspects of Nauvoo’s past that had been overlooked.⁸⁸

Glen Leonard, in a 1995 issue of *BYU Studies*, published an article “Picturing the Nauvoo Legion,” in which he argued that the artwork involv-

ing Joseph Smith and the Nauvoo Legion ensure a place for the twenty-five hundred legion members in the visual history of Nauvoo and also “raises interesting questions about the historical accuracy of the portrayed information, including the setting and the militia uniforms.”⁸⁹ In the same issue, Susan Easton Black seems to forever put to rest the nagging question of how many people resided in Mormon Nauvoo. She concluded that the figure around 11,000 in 1845 is a fairly accurate number, not the 25,000 figure that is found in some of the literature.⁹⁰

In 1996, Hallwas and Launius published another book they titled *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited*. Believing that Nauvoo “is central to Mormon identity,” and “a verification of religious truth,” the two authors compiled essays that had been originally published in scholarly journals that were mostly known to specialists in Mormon history. They believed the essays to be “the more insightful and significant historical work on the Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo.”⁹¹ The criteria used in selecting the essays which they did, and omitting others, “centered on three factors; the essays had to be of importance to the various historical stages of Mormon Nauvoo; they had to reflect a perspective and emphasize a theme that was not duplicated by other essays in the volume; and they had to be thorough, well supported, influential, and clearly written.”⁹² Paul Edwards wrote that *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited* represented “a significant collection . . . that provides a depth and breadth of understanding reflective of the latest and best in Mormon history.”⁹³

As the twentieth century drew to a close and scores of articles continued to appear regarding aspects of Nauvoo’s history, Todd Compton, educated in classics at the University of California Los Angeles, published his book, *In Sacred Loneliness: The Plural Wives of Joseph Smith*. Compton’s volume was called by historians Richard L. Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, “a landmark . . . publication,” and “an ambitious first book,” introducing readers for the first time, to the “unique socioreligious practice [plural marriage]” and to the women “who were sealed to the Prophet.”⁹⁴ Compton’s “central thesis is that Mormon polygamy was characterized by a tragic ambiguity. . . . It was the new and everlasting covenant, having eternal significance . . . on the other hand . . . it was a social system that simply did not work in nineteenth-century America.”⁹⁵ Anderson and Faulring believed that the book “offers little that could be considered faithful or [have] sympathetic understanding of the doctrinal foundations of the practice,” and while confident they had learned from Compton’s work, they were “disturbed by its dissonances.”⁹⁶

Danel W. Bachman, who wrote a book length master’s thesis at Purdue University titled, “A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage

before the Death of Joseph Smith (1975), also reviewed Compton's book and found problems in the sources Compton used "to define the theology of plural marriage," because the statements he used "are scavenged from the five decades following the martyrdom; some are very late memoirs."⁹⁷ Bachman also found the book flawed because of Compton's belief that plural marriage was harmful to the women involved, was an experiment born in the speculative theological environment of upstate New York, and his argument that plural marriage "was a fundamentally flawed marital institution."⁹⁸ Compton's greatest contribution is the biographies of the thirty-three Nauvoo women he believes were sealed to Joseph Smith in his lifetime. Though many faithful Latter-day Saints find this volume troubling, they do learn a great deal about the women whose lives are scrutinized by the Compton pen.

The following represents some of the most important studies that include important biographical and historical information of the Illinois period of Mormonism. In 1984, Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery published their award winning biography of Emma Hale Smith, more than two-thirds of which deals with her experiences in Nauvoo. An argument can be made that one of the volume's major contributions to Mormon history is the detail it provides regarding Emma's life after the death of Joseph Smith as she toiled out her days on the banks of the Mississippi.⁹⁹ Ronald K. Esplin in his 1981 doctoral dissertation focused on Brigham Young as he emerged as Mormonism's chief apostle. Much of Esplin's research provides background for the Nauvoo experience and helps historians understand the role Brigham Young and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles played in the history of Nauvoo.¹⁰⁰ Myrtle Stevens Hyde, as the twenty-first century dawned, published her biography of Orson Hyde in which she devotes almost a hundred pages to his experiences as the kingdom on the Mississippi rose and fell.¹⁰¹ Both Roger D. Launius and Valeen Tippetts Avery authored prize winning biographies that focus on two of Joseph Smith's children, Joseph Smith III and David Hyrum, who lived more years in Nauvoo than any of the Latter-day Saints who came west. These two volumes expand our knowledge of the City of Joseph while most of the Mormons were establishing new homes in the Great Basin.¹⁰² Ronald O. Barney's book, *One Side by Himself: The Life and Time of Lewis Barney, 1808-1844*, provides his readers with access to the diaries of Lewis Barney during his residence in Nauvoo as he recorded many of his experiences there.¹⁰³ William G. Hartley, *The 1845 Burning of Morley's Settlement and Murder of Edmund Durfee*, is of value for those interested in the violence that besieged the Mormons in Hancock County.¹⁰⁴ Hartley also wrote a biography of John Lowe Butler,¹⁰⁵ a man who "participated in plural marriage as a trusted insid-

er in Nauvoo, and took part in two controversial and often maligned, wilderness expeditions along the upper Missouri River.”¹⁰⁶ Max Parkin, in his review of Hartley’s book, wrote that it “adds new information to familiar stories and enriches obscure or misunderstood” aspects of Latter-day Saint history.¹⁰⁷ Hartley, Parkin writes, “also provides readers with new details about Joseph Smith in Illinois, including Butler’s hard ride to Monmouth in 1843 to help free Joseph Smith from his Missouri abductors, and Butler’s assistance in secretly burying the Smith brothers’ bodies in the basement of the Nauvoo House after the martyrdom.”¹⁰⁸

When my dissertation proposal, “Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois,” went before the LDS Church Board of Education in 1966, it was at first turned down, the reason cited being that the story of Nauvoo has been told. Only help from William E. Berrett, Gustive O. Larsen, Milton V. Backman and Joseph Fielding Smith’s attendance at the next meeting, allowed me to pursue my topic. Since 1966 thousands of articles and scores of books have appeared relating to the Mormon experience in Illinois and the well of scholarship still has water enough for an additional drink or two. Both Poll and Leonard called attention to gaps in our understanding of Nauvoo, many of which have now been filled, but not all. Some additional topics that need fleshing out follow.

The history of the “Half-Breed land tract” and its relationship to Latter-day Saint land purchases has not been told and appears to be both interesting and relevant to the Mormon Nauvoo experience. The story of the Nauvoo Municipal Court, the high council court, the minutes of which are available to scholars, needs telling. As yet there has not appeared a full history of the Nauvoo economy, the business dealings of Joseph Smith, nor the full story of his taking out bankruptcy. In addition, the full story of the Nauvoo economy after the Prophet’s death has not been told. Another subject is the history of the Council of Fifty, the minutes of which will soon be published, I am told. The details of masonry in Nauvoo, the experiences of Mormon women, daily life among the “common folk,” what they wore and ate and their manners has not been fully examined. The history of children and teenagers, too, remains to be written.

Biographies devoted to Thomas Ford, Thomas C. Sharp, Levi Williams, Robert Smith and other anti-Mormons would flesh out Nauvoo’s history even more. Needed, too, are biography’s of William and Wilson Law, the Fosters, the Higbees, Joseph Jackson, and a plethora of others who turned on Joseph and the Church. Andrew F. Smith and his biography of John C. Bennett¹⁰⁹ and Richard Van Wagoner’s on Sidney Rigdon¹¹⁰ have shown us that mining the lives of those considered scoundrels and Saints sheds light in corners too long dark. Biographies, too, on Joseph Smith’s sisters, his

brothers, his father, and lesser known figures would be helpful.

Milton V. Bachman, assisted by others, created an electronic Nauvoo data base that provides scholars with many of the sources to tell Nauvoo's story through the eyes of those who lived there. Researchers should be cautioned, that some things have been omitted from these journal and reminiscences and the typed script should be checked against the original. These are only available in Nauvoo, at the Church Historical Department, and at Brigham Young University.

Don F. Colvin's book, *The History of the Nauvoo Temple*, fills an important niche in telling the story of Nauvoo's most significant building. Glen Leonard's new book, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A People of Promise*, features research from letters, minutes, diaries, journals, early publications, and newspaper accounts, as well as recent scholarly writings which helps paint a vivid picture of the people of Nauvoo—their faith, their economy, and their strivings to build a temple. It also details challenges—the suspicion and hatred many outsiders felt toward the Mormons, the foes within the fold, and the martyrdom. The letters and papers of Frank Worrell, recently discovered, are being transcribed and will be made available to historians. They will assist in fleshing out the life of this man and his role in the Mormon experience.

Histories need to be written of Mormon branches in Illinois, Iowa, other parts of the United States, and even those in Europe. While Joseph Smith resided in his "Kingdom on the Mississippi," there were Latter-day Saints who did not live in Kirtland, Missouri or Nauvoo, who were active in branches far away from the main Mormon centers. These Saints had few, if any, contacts with the Mormon leader. It would be instructive to know what church doctrines they were taught and when. Did they know about plural marriage, temple ceremonies, the Council of Fifty, and some of the doctrines Joseph Smith taught just before his martyrdom?¹¹¹ The story of those Mormons who stayed behind while the rest of the Saints went west could be told in greater detail and depth. How was their church experience different from those who gathered to the Great Basin? Histories which compare Nauvoo and the Mormons experience there with the experiences of other people who were building cities in America in the 1840s would also make a valuable contribution. More work, as well, should be done regarding the Church in Nauvoo and how it operated and functioned. It is probable that in another ten years or less another historian will call for better, more insightful histories of Nauvoo because each new generation needs to look at the past through their own eyes, based on their own experiences, and in doing so they will uncover stones overlooked by those who went before them. Finally, the encyclopedic history of Nauvoo that Klaus Hansen called

for has not been written. However, I believe the resources are now in place for doing just that. This history, larger than one volume, is just waiting for someone willing to spend ten years or so examining the sources and doing the writing.

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