

Willard Richards as Historian

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From the very organization of the Church on 6 April 1830, the writing of the history of the Church was considered a “duty imperative.”¹ Although Joseph Smith was the prime motivator behind most of the Church’s early record keeping and history writing, he lacked the necessary literary skills for much of the work and therefore relied heavily upon his clerks and the Church historians to accomplish the day-to-day work. But with variations in title and frequent changes in personnel, the offices of Church recorder and Church historian functioned erratically until 1843, when both callings were consolidated and assigned to Willard Richards. Richards, who brought new stability, talent, and impetus to these offices, was singularly qualified among all the early elders of the Church.

As a boy, Richards eagerly sought education and demonstrated both an affinity and an aptitude for learning. One author suggests that Richards occasionally provoked the displeasure of his father, Joseph, for staying up late to read by candlelight and then being unable to arise the next morning in time for his chores on the family farm at Richmond, Massachusetts.² In his quest for religious knowledge, he apparently became disillusioned with the brand of Calvinism being preached in the family’s Congregational Church and so remained rather aloof from organized religion. During his studies in many different fields, he taught school for a while. In his scientific pursuits, he became interested in electricity and subsequently presented lectures on the subject in some nearby towns. While on one of these lecture tours, he acquired a copy of Dr. Samuel Thomson’s *Practice of Medicine* and was persuaded to become an herbal doctor specializing in the use of lobelia. He launched a medical career by successfully prescribing for his two ailing sisters, and after purchasing a patent for twenty dollars, he expanded his practice to the community.³

Dr. Richards’s life took a new direction when he happened upon a copy of the Book of Mormon which had been left by his cousin, Brigham Young, who had already joined the Saints in northern Ohio. He read the book through twice in ten days and immediately began selling his medicines, “settling his accounts,” and making preparations to travel the seven hundred miles to the Church headquarters at Kirkland, Ohio. Only after a year and a half of investigation did he join the Church in 1836. As a thirty-two-year-old bachelor, unencumbered by wife or family, he spent the next several years doing missionary work in the eastern states and England.

While abroad, he married a refined English girl, Jennetta, with the same surname as his own, and was soon after ordained an Apostle by Brigham Young and other members of the Quorum of Twelve then laboring in the rapidly expanding English Mission. In England Richards demonstrated his literary abilities by assisting Parley P. Pratt as editor of the *Millennial Star*. Leaving his wife and a new son in England until he could prepare a place for them to live in America, Elder Richards returned to the United States with some of his fellow Apostles, arriving in Nauvoo, Illinois, in August 1841.⁴ He boarded with his cousin, Brigham Young, for a short time, but on 12 January 1842 Richards moved in with Joseph Smith⁵ to facilitate the rapidly escalating clerical and literary work. During the previous month, he had been appointed private secretary to Joseph Smith, recorder for the uncompleted temple at Nauvoo, and general Church clerk. Shortly after his election to the Nauvoo City Council, he became the recorder for that group and clerk of the municipal court as well.⁶ On 21 December 1842 he was interviewed by Joseph Smith and given the additional assignment of Church historian.⁷ Seven months later he was appointed Church recorder.⁸ To accommodate Richards in his heavy clerical responsibilities, Joseph Smith gave him space in the Prophet's own new office on the second floor of his brick store in Nauvoo. The two men continued a very close relationship that was broken only by Richards's short trip to meet his family in the East and by the forced seclusion of the Prophet while he tried to outmaneuver his enemies.

Willard Richards undoubtedly recorded more of the sources that were used in the later compilation of the history of the Church than any other single person. As the "intimate disciple," he kept Joseph Smith's personal journal for nearly four years, making one entry in Carthage Jail shortly before the attack of the mob. His notes and recollections of those events became the basis for his well-known "Two Minutes in Jail," which has been the principal source for all the standard pro-Latter-day Saint accounts of the martyrdom. In addition to keeping Joseph Smith's personal records, Richards also wrote regularly in most of the Church and municipal records and even directed and organized the work of the other Church clerks (see table 1).

Richards kept Joseph Smith's journals in a first-person narrative, although the material was obviously not all dictated by the Prophet. This first-person approach preserved the narrative form of the earlier journals that did contain holographic and dictated entries by the Prophet and apparently conformed with Joseph's general plans for the Church annals. Many of the entries in the journals are brief notes that Richards intended to expand later as he wrote the history of the Church or obtained information from others, but, unfortunately, this "filling in" was not completed before

Table 1. Scribes and Clerks for Major Church History Sources

<i>Church History Source</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Dates Kept</i>	<i>Scribes and Clerks</i>
Joseph Smith Letter Book (1829–1843)	245	1837–43	James Mulholland Robert B. Thompson Howard Coray Willard Richards William Clayton Others
Nauvoo Municipal Court Docket	102	1841–45	James Sloan Willard Richards Thomas Bullock
Nauvoo City Council Proceedings	241	1841–45	James Sloan Willard Richards Thomas Bullock
Joseph Smith Journal	281	1842–43	Willard Richards
The Law of the Lord	315	1842–45?	Joseph Smith Willard Richards Thomas Bullock William Clayton
Joseph Smith Journal	309	1843	Willard Richards
Joseph Smith Journal	280	1843–44	Willard Richards
Joseph Smith Journal	280	1844	Willard Richards

Source: LDS Church Archives. Handwriting identified by Dean C. Jessee, senior research historian. Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, Brigham Young University.

his death. His successor, George A. Smith, was left with the task of deciphering Richards's notes and fleshing out the narrative as best he could.⁹ This task was especially difficult for Joseph Smith's sermons, which were recorded mostly in longhand notes that required considerable emendation.

In addition to keeping the Prophet's journals and most of the official Church records which later served as the basic narrative framework for the *History of the Church*, Richards also kept a personal journal, which often corroborated or supplemented the other sources he was recording. Begun in 1836, his personal journal was mostly a missionary diary until he came to Nauvoo in 1841. It contains some rudimentary shorthand, and many entries are just brief notes; there are some gaps, notably 1848–49. And the diary was discontinued in 1852, two years before his death. These journals, totaling nineteen small volumes, were used by Richards and later by George A. Smith in compiling the history of the Church.

Richards's earliest direct involvement in the compilation of the history of the Church was apparently the addition of some notes during a period in 1842 when W. W. Phelps was writing in the first volume of the Manuscript History. Phelps completed the Manuscript History down to August 1831 (page 130); then the narrative is interrupted by three pages of notes in the handwriting of Willard Richards. These notes, captioned A, B, and C, are out of chronological order and contain supplementary information relating to Joseph Smith's early life and visions. In the earlier pages of the manuscript are small notations which refer to these later interpolations and which clearly indicate where they were intended to fit into the preceding narrative. A reference to the notes in Richards's diary establishes the fact that they were written in December 1842.¹⁰ The notes reflect information that must have been obtained from Joseph himself.

On 11 December 1841 the Prophet expressed his deep concern with the limited progress that had been made on the history as he recounted the following problems and misfortunes that seemed to either interrupt or impede the writing of the Church annals:

Since I have been engaged in laying the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have been prevented in various ways from continuing my journal and history in a manner satisfactory to myself or in justice to the cause. Long imprisonments, vexatious and long-continued lawsuits, the treachery of some of my clerks, the death of others, and the poverty of myself and brethren from continued plunder and driving, have prevented my handing down to posterity a connected memorandum of events desirable to all lovers of truth; yet I have continued to keep up a journal in the best manner my circumstances would allow, and dictate for my history from time to time, as I have had opportunity so that the labors and suffering of the first Elders and Saints of this last kingdom might not wholly be lost to the world.¹¹

Just two days later, on 13 December 1841, Joseph Smith appointed Willard Richards as his private secretary, general clerk, and recorder for the unfinished Nauvoo Temple.¹² Richards recorded that he "began to board with Prophet Smith" one month later,¹³ but his work on the Manuscript History of the Church did not begin until 21 December 1842. On this day he was interviewed by the Prophet and "appointed private Sect. & Historian."¹⁴ His first entry in Joseph Smith's journal was made this same day, and on 24 and 25 December, Richards recorded in his own journal that he was working on the history with Joseph Smith.¹⁵ The Church history that was eventually compiled for 24 December reads: "At home afternoon. Read and revised my history with Secretary Richards."¹⁶ W. W. Phelps was not released from his work when Richards was assigned the dominant role but continued to assist the Doctor with the project.¹⁷ Richards was ill most of January 1843 but was at work in Joseph Smith's office on the twentieth when the Prophet came in to give Phelps and him "some instructions about

the History.”¹⁸ For February, Richards’s journal contains almost daily entries that say, “Writing at Joseph’s.” During the first week in March he received some further counsel from the Prophet, who observed: “I told Dr. Richards that there was one thing he failed in as a historian, and that was noting surrounding objects, weather, etc.”¹⁹ While issuing instructions and giving assignments to the Twelve in April 1843, Joseph Smith reiterated Elder Richards’s responsibility “to continue in the History at present.”²⁰

The Manuscript History shows that Willard Richards started writing on page 158, where the narrative deals with the events of 1 November 1831. Richards’s journal indicates that he worked almost daily on the history in March and April, but he does not record his specific progress on the project until 8 May, when he noted, “I wrote pages 271, 2, & 3.”²¹ By 31 May he had reached page 453, which meant that in about six months he had produced nearly twice as much written history as all his predecessors.

In spite of the accelerated progress on the history, Joseph Smith continued to exhibit a great deal of anxiety about the project. On 19 May he “told Brother Phelps a dream that the history must go ahead before anything else.”²² On 7 November 1843 Richards and Phelps called on the Prophet to report that Mr. Cole, a school teacher, had moved his tables into a hall too close to where they were working and “that the noise in the school disturbed them in the progress of writing the History.”²³ Joseph responded:

I gave orders that Cole must look out for another place, as the history must continue and not be disturbed, as there are but few subjects that I have felt a greater anxiety about than my history, which has been a very difficult task, on account of the death of my best clerks and the apostasy of others, and the stealing of records by John Whitmer, Cyrus Smalling and others.²⁴

There was steady progress on the history throughout this period in spite of the difficulties. In August 1843 Richards completed the first volume of the Manuscript History, later designated A-1. He reserved several pages at the end of the journal for “Addenda,” which could be inserted in the narrative during the review and revision of the manuscript. The “Addenda” in Book A-1 eventually grew to sixteen pages, which are mostly in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock, who made the additions after the Prophet’s death. Similar additions to the history were made at the end of each subsequent volume.

On 24 August 1843 Richards started writing in the second volume of the history, book B-1. The page-numbering sequence from the first volume was continued, and by 14 November Richards had reached page 748. Practically nothing was written the rest of 1843, but in January and February of 1844 the manuscript was continued to page 803. From that time until the death of Joseph Smith on 27 June only nine more pages were added, which carried the historical narrative down to 5 August 1838.

Richards described his hopes and expectations concerning the history in the following letter to a Mr. Moffatt on 27 March 1844:

It is now seven years since I have laid my head one night in my own house [he was building a house in Nauvoo which was not completed yet] during that time I have been in England, near four years and the remainder of the time have spent in writing the History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which, of course will afford no income until it is completed and printed which cannot possibly be done for one or two years. It is a great work and all important to the Church and world.²⁵

Richards's hope for some remuneration for his work on the history was never realized; neither was his goal to have the history finished in one or two years.

During his final hours in Carthage Jail, Joseph Smith apparently instructed Willard Richards to continue the history according to the plan and format that they had previously followed,²⁶ but it was mid-January 1845 before Richards could get back to his work on the project. Without Joseph Smith to dictate, revise, or supervise the future writing and publication of the Church annals, Richards turned to others for assistance and established new procedures for compiling the history. Thomas Bullock, who had been employed as a clerk by Joseph Smith since November 1843 and had worked closely with Richards for over a year, became Willard's faithful assistant. W. W. Phelps continued to collect materials,²⁷ but his role in the project was greatly diminished by this time.

The history was compiled under the general supervision of Brigham Young, who visited the Church historian occasionally but apparently did not get involved in the details of work.²⁸ As the posthumous writing of Joseph Smith's history commenced, a rough draft was prepared by Richards and Bullock which is still extant in the LDS Church Archives (see table 2).

The rough draft begins with the history for 6 August 1838—the very date reached by Richards before the death of the Prophet—and starts out in the handwriting of Willard Richards (see fig. 1). Some preliminary rough drafts were probably used by other compilers of the history, but they have not survived in any organized condition and are therefore difficult to identify; the use of rough drafts is not mentioned specifically by any of the earlier scribes. Richards's rough draft is written on loose foolscap with pagination that starts over again every few pages. This preliminary draft permitted Richards to leave most of the tedious writing to Bullock, who copied into the Manuscript History book the connecting narrative and the numerous sources that were merely listed by Richards in the rough draft. Numerous corrections and additions were made right in the rough draft before it was copied (see fig. 2). The finished Manuscript History shows that Bullock started writing the history in that volume for the very same

Table 2. Rough Draft of the *History of the Church*

<i>Written by:</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Historical Period Covered</i>
Willard Richards	1–77	Aug. 6, 1838, to Dec. 30, 1839
Willard Richards	1–19	Jan. 1, 1840, to Dec. 30, 1840
Willard Richards	1–23	Jan. 1, 1841, to Dec. 30, 1841
Willard Richards	1–19	Jan. 1, 1842, to June 30, 1842
Willard Richards	1–24	July 1, 1842, to Dec. 31, 1842
Willard Richards	1–13	Jan. 1, 1843, to Jan. 29, 1843
Thomas Bullock	13–26	Jan. 30, 1843, to Mar. 3, 1843
Thomas Bullock	1–89	Mar. 1, 1843, to Dec. 29, 1843
Jonathan Grimshaw	1–5	Jan. 1, 1844, to Jan. 27, 1844
Thomas Bullock	7–72	Feb. 1, 1844, to June 21, 1844
Jonathan Grimshaw Leo Hawkins Robert L. Campbell		
Thomas Bullock	1–76	June 22, 1844, to June 28, 1844
Jonathan Grimshaw Leo Hawkins Robert L. Campbell		
Robert L. Campbell	1–18	June 22, 1844, to Aug. 8, 1844

Source: LDS Church Archives. Dean C. Jessee assisted in identifying the handwriting of the different scribes.

date that Richards commenced compiling the rough draft—6 August 1838. From the foregoing the procedure is clear: Richards was responsible for the actual composition of the history in the rough draft, and after revisions were made, Bullock copied the text in its finished form into the Manuscript History book.

Although Richards now wrote the history without the participation of Joseph Smith, he still continued the first-person narrative that had characterized the history during Joseph Smith's lifetime. According to George A. Smith, Richards had been instructed by the Prophet in Carthage Jail to continue the plan of compiling the history.²⁹ As the Prophet's "Private Sect. & Historian," Richards apparently felt he had the necessary investiture of authority to permit him to write for and even as if he were Joseph Smith. Richards had already written in the first person most of the Prophet's journals, which were a major source for the Church annals, but he went far beyond this practice and actually transposed material from other writers

and sources into the first person of Joseph Smith.³⁰ All of these modifications were made, of course, without the assistance or review of the central character of the history.

Work on the history progressed at a much accelerated rate during the early months of 1845. Volume two, or B-1, was filled up in February and March, and by April Bullock had commenced writing in a third volume, C-1.³¹ Richards's and Bullock's journals both show that the men worked on the history almost daily during the first three months of 1845.

Although Brigham Young had always supported Richards and Bullock in their work, on 1 April 1845 he assumed a more active role in the preparation of the history. His history for this day reads:

Tuesday, April 1, 1845.—I commenced revising the History of Joseph Smith at Brother Richards' office: Elder Heber C. Kimball and George A. Smith were with me. President Joseph Smith had corrected forty-two pages before his massacre. It afforded us great satisfaction to hear Brother Richards read the history of the infancy of the church. Adjourned at eleven p.m. having read one hundred and forty pages in Book 'A'.³²

The events of this day must have impressed all the participants, for it is well attested in their journals. The date when Brigham Young began "revising the History" is also corroborated by a note at the top of page 42 of the manuscript which reads: "Tuesday [April] 1st—Commenced revising."³³ Page 42 in the manuscript is in the handwriting of James Mulholland, the first clerk to write in the Manuscript History book, and deals with a conference held on 1 June 1830. It is apparent that the Prophet entrusted a great deal of the responsibility for his history to his scribes and the Church historians, for he had reviewed and checked the history only up to page 42 by the time of his death, even though it had already been published in the *Times and Seasons* up to page 179 and had been written up to page 812. Although the history was "revised by the Council of the First Presidency almost without any alteration," Brigham Young continued the practice of having the history read to him until it was finished in 1858.³⁴

On 3 April 1845 the Church historian was occupied in preparing a recapitulation of the work done on the history up to that time. C. W. Wandell, one of the clerks, was put to work counting the words written by each scribe, and Richards recorded the results in his journal.³⁵ According to this summary, the previous clerks and Richards had written 250,259 words in the first volume (A-1); Richards and Bullock had written 159,479 words in the second volume (B-1); and Bullock had written 250,200 words in the third volume (C-1). The narrative of the history had been carried down to the end of 1841.

Due to the increased attacks of the anti-Mormons in Illinois and the anticipation of the hazards of the Latter-day Saint migration to the West,

Richards had the clerks begin copying a duplicate of the history.³⁶ This duplicate was not only an insurance copy, but also the latest revised transcript of the history. It was continued on a somewhat sporadic basis for over eleven years but was discontinued in 1856 when a vault was completed in the new Church Historian's Office where all the records could be stored safely.

Richards's resolve to get the history finished was sorely tested in the later months of 1845. His problems seemed to start when he had to stay home on 17 May to doctor his wife Jennetta, who was pregnant and suffering serious complications. He often went for days without taking off his clothes to rest as he labored day and night trying to save his wife and child. In his anxiety he practically stopped all work on the history and even neglected his own journal. On 6 July he felt encouraged because the baby showed signs of life, but in spite of oft-repeated prayers and administrations by Brigham Young, John Taylor, George A. Smith, and John Smith, his wife and baby died on 9 July.³⁷ Bullock notified the sisters to come and attend to Jennetta's body, and she was buried on 11 July at the southwest corner of the lot where the family had just moved into a new home.

By 14 July Richards was back at work on the history, but after a few months his health began to fail him. It was his custom to get up around 5:00 A.M. and write for some time before breakfast, but he was soon unable to stick to this schedule. For help he turned to his friend and adopted son Bullock, who began making entries in Richards's journal for him and also started writing the rough draft of the history. Bullock's handwriting in the rough draft seems to indicate that he began composing the history at this point, but Bullock explained in the Doctor's journal the actual procedure. In his anxiety to complete the history, Richards invited Bullock to his home, where Willard got out of his sickbed, sat in a chair, and dictated the rough draft.³⁸ As Richards grew a little stronger, he sometimes dictated until dark in a dogged effort to grind out the historical narrative.

After 20 January 1846 the work on the history wound down rather steadily as Bullock began "sorting and packing Books &c" for the journey west.³⁹ On 4 February when the last book of the manuscript was apparently closed and packed, the history had been written to 1 March 1843—ending in the middle of page 1485 in volume D-1. Bullock penned a note of explanation on this last page of the history: "books packed Feb. 4, 1846 in Nauvoo."⁴⁰ Some remaining papers were packed up in a "large box" the next day, and Bullock completed a one-page inventory.⁴¹

In spite of the rigors of travel and the inconvenience of a mobile Historian's Office, Richards continued "writing history" from time to time as the Saints moved across Iowa.⁴² At Winter Quarters, Richards managed to build a house which was known as the Octagon because of its built-on appendages. This structure served not only as his home, but also as the

Historian's Office and a make-shift Church headquarters during the winter of 1846–47.⁴³ On 2 April 1847 Richards and Bullock were again busy “packing up papers & books for History” and “preparing for the Pioneer journey.”⁴⁴ Although Richards and Bullock accompanied the original pioneer company of 1847 and held important record-keeping assignments, their main storehouse of boxed records was left behind at Winter Quarters until such time as the records could be brought safely across the plains. Eventually Bullock was the one who in the summer of 1848 transported the boxes with all the records to Salt Lake Valley.⁴⁵

Although some of the historical records were used to resume the publication of the history of the Church in the *Deseret News* in November 1851, most of the records were apparently not even unpacked until June 1853. Bullock, who often wrote small enough to inscribe his whole letter on the postage stamp, penned a tiny note at the top of the first page of history written in Utah: “The books were unpacked in G.S.L. City by Willard Richards and Bullock. June 7, 1853. J. Grimshaw & Miles Romney present.”⁴⁶ Some remaining boxes were unpacked on 7 June, but it was not until 1 December 1853 that Richards returned to his task of writing the history. Richards's abortive effort is described in another of Bullock's marginal notes: “Dec. 1 1853 D. Willard Richards wrote one line of History—being sick at the time—and was never able to do any more.”⁴⁷ This last line of history for 1 March 1843, which was dictated by Richards and written by Bullock, ends abruptly in the middle of a sentence. Later, at the end of the 28 February entry, Bullock wrote in the margin: “end of W. Richards compiling.”⁴⁸ After suffering several debilitating attacks over a period of eighteen years, Richards succumbed to dropsy on 11 March 1854 at the age of forty-nine. He was the first Apostle of the Restoration to die a natural death.

It seems well within the mark to conclude that Willard Richards, more than any other person, was responsible for the actual compilation and publication of the history of Joseph Smith (see table 3). Any historian must admire the actual volume of his literary output under very trying and unsettled conditions. Equally inspiring is his dedication, tenacity, persistence, and ability to write correctly and clearly. But in spite of his tremendous accomplishments and contributions, his history suffers most of the shortcomings and defects of amateur history writing in the early nineteenth century.

History written in the first half of that century has been described variously by students of historiography as patrician history, literary history, or romantic history.⁴⁹ It was written mostly by independent gentlemen who had the time and inclination for such literary pursuits and “was animated by patriotism,” reverence for its subjects, and party and personal loyalties. History was generally “regarded as a branch of literature,” and “style was paramount.”⁵⁰ Much of this history was marked by bias, embellishment,

Table 3. Time Schedule for Writing the Manuscript History of Joseph Smith

<i>Men Compiling and Copying the History</i>	<i>Pages Written</i>	<i>Period Covered</i>	<i>When Written</i>
<i>Before Joseph Smith's Death on 27 June 1844</i>			
Joseph Smith	A-1, 1–59	Dec. 23, 1805	June 11, 1839
James Mulholland		to Sept. 26, 1830	to Oct. 27, 1839
Joseph Smith	A-1, 60–75	Sept. 26, 1830	Oct. 3, 1840
Robert Thompson		to Oct. 1830	to Aug. 27, 1841
Howard Coray			
Joseph Smith	A-1, 75–157	Oct. 1830	1841–1842
W. W. Phelps		to Nov. 1, 1831	
Joseph Smith	A-1, 158	Nov. 1, 1831	Dec. 21, 1842
Willard Richards	to B-1, 812	to Aug. 5, 1838	to Mar. 2, 1844
<i>After Joseph Smith's Death</i>			
Willard Richards	B-1, 812	Aug. 6, 1838	Jan. 15, 1845
Thomas Bullock	to D-1, 1486	to Mar. 1, 1843	to Dec. 1, 1853
George A. Smith	D-1, 1486	Mar. 1, 1843	Apt. 18, 1854
Wilford Woodruff	to F-1, 304	to Aug. 8, 1844	to Jan. 30, 1857
Thomas Bullock			
Leo Hawkins			
Robert Campbell			
Jonathan Grimshaw			

Sources: Manuscript History of the Church, James Mulholland Journal, Willard Richards Journal, Historian's Office Journal, George A. Smith Journal, Wilford Woodruff Journal, and Howard Coray Autobiography, all in the LDS Church Archives; and Dean C. Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1971), 441.

inaccuracy, and plagiarism.⁵¹ Thus it is unfair to appraise the work of Willard Richards by the standards and techniques that evolved in the succeeding century, for the accepted methodology of modern historians as they relate to plagiarism, documentation, and strict adherence to sources are comparatively recent developments in America and were not practiced even by professional historians until fifty years after Richards had completed his work on the Church annals.⁵²

One of the more obvious defects of Willard Richards's historical writing, when viewed from a twentieth-century perspective, is its misleading and confused authorship. Most of the first-person narrative of Joseph Smith was ghostwritten by Richards, and much of what Richards wrote was plagiarized from other writers. The first-person format may have been imposed upon Richards by the Prophet at the beginning of their collaboration, but whatever his reasons, Richards stuck faithfully to the same style of narrative to the very end. Joseph Smith was associated closely enough to Richards to provide input for the history from time to time, but he reviewed the finished manuscript only to page 42 and must have left most of the work and details to Richards. At this time it seems impossible to definitively separate all of the actual dictation and input of the Prophet from the contributions and coloration of his scribes and ghostwriters even though most of the diaries, journals, minute books, letter books, and periodical articles that comprised the sources for the Church annals are well preserved in the LDS Church Archives and it is still possible to identify the original authors of many of these sources.

Willard Richards's historical writing clearly belongs to the Judaeo-Christian tradition of providential history. This type of history is "an interpretation of time in terms of eternity and of human events in the light of divine revelation."⁵³ It focuses on the story of God's dealings with his people and the interpretation of all human events within the framework of this central theme. The *History of the Church*, like Judaeo-Christian history, is an affirmation of faith as well as a historical narrative. The major events of Church history are endowed with the highest religious and ideological significance, and the result is an account where faith and history are inseparably intertwined.

Richards interpreted the role of God in history from a perspective of faith that may have reflected images of his New England background and his recent defection from Calvinism. Like other Christians of the early nineteenth century, he was strongly influenced by ideas of predestination and divine retribution and was inclined to take the reverent view that in all things—good or bad—"God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform." God's hand was confessed not only in blessings and fortunate events, but also in tribulation, tragedies, and setbacks. Negative and harmful experiences were interpreted as either trials for the faithful or punishment of and retribution on the not-so-faithful. God's intervention had much in common with the judgments of the Old Testament, the Greek formula of nemesis, and the Calvinist doctrine of divine retribution. In fitting events into this cause-and-effect pattern, Richards and other early authors of Church history did not always insist—as did Gilbert and Sullivan—that the punishment fit the crime. As with the Greek doctrine of nemesis, great

calamities were often attributed to small and trifling causes. The narrative of Zion's Camp suggests that a Mrs. Moss and three other members of her family perished in Missouri because she was "afraid of the cholera" which had broken out in the Latter-day Saint camp and had refused the men's request for "a drink of water."⁵⁴ Other punishments seemed more justly matched to the offense. A boastful Missouri mob leader and six of his men drowned while trying to cross a river. A rain-and-hail storm resulted in the death of another mobster, who was struck by lightning;⁵⁵ in the soaking of the attacking mob's gunpowder; and in the complete isolation of the Saints from their enemies.

With this emphasis on the intervention of God in human events, there was a general neglect of more natural causation by Richards. Although the doctrines of the Restoration proclaimed the free agency of man and the reign of law, these causal factors were not usually investigated or emphasized as dominant. Seeking for explanations and answers other than God might have appeared to this devout disciple as a negation of faith in the sovereignty of God, so such natural factors were usually ignored. Such an approach has been described as extreme supernaturalism—a philosophy of history where the events of the Restoration are treated as a divine miracle occurring in what appears to be a historical vacuum. However, this neglect of natural causation by Richards should not be interpreted as a denial of the fact that such causal factors are operative in the historical process; it is only an indication that such matters were usually beyond the interest and objectives of the writer.

Although the meaning and interpretation of events in Church history were matters of faith, such intuitive deductions and conclusions were expected to be based upon reliable information. Faith was not equated with credulity or superstition. According to Church doctrine, "true faith" springs "from trustworthy evidence, rightly interpreted."⁵⁶ The writers of the Church annals were among the leading actors in the events portrayed and were, therefore, themselves personal witnesses to most of the things they wrote about. There were often several such eye-witness reports available for use in comparing and corroborating facts and in rounding out the narrative. The result has been a history that is remarkably accurate in its factual content. Richards and his assistants were men of integrity and took pride in presenting the truth as they perceived it.

From the beginning, Richards and his associates were motivated to keep accurate records, but they were sometimes hampered by lack of adequate skills and materials. Shorthand was not utilized with any effectiveness during Richards's work on the history, with the result that conversations and sermons were never recorded verbatim. The penmanship, including that of Richards, often left much to be desired; ink was not of equal consistency or

permanence; and the primitive hand-dipped pens contributed to uneven shading and ink spots. In spite of all these difficulties, however, most of the sources and manuscripts of early Church history are remarkably legible and complete.

Changes were made in some of the sources in the belief that the original author would have made these corrections himself if he had had the time and opportunity, while other changes were made on the basis of supplementary information which the historians wanted to amalgamate into the narrative. Although they deliberately altered many of their sources to make them fit the style, form, and objectives of the history, they did not completely conceal their methodology. The changes which were introduced into the history without annotation are not so much an attempt to deceive as a product of the writers' flawed nineteenth-century historical methodology. The sources, along with rough drafts and manuscripts where the changes were clearly indicated, were all carefully preserved for future checking and verification.

Richards undoubtedly desired to produce a history that was conducive to faith in the Restoration, but at the same time he felt a strong obligation to tell the truth. He never seems to have embraced the idea that the end justifies the means, but he nonetheless had to reconcile being honest and accurate with edifying his readers and promoting the image of the Church and its leaders. The usual solution to this predicament was simply to leave out the objectionable and negative material. This approach was apparently considered a judicious use of truth, an approach which would best serve the cause of the Kingdom. By the criteria of the modern historical method, Richards and his associates clearly erred in misrepresenting and corrupting their sources, but it should be acknowledged that such historical procedures were common at that time and that these historical transgressions were mostly the result of sincere biases and an archaic methodology.

One source of Richards's concern for the image of the Church and its Prophet was the persecution complex of the early Saints and leaders. Having lived through physical and verbal attacks for years, Richards was understandably defensive and wary. His writing reflects the characteristics of historical apologia as he defends and justifies the faith and actions of the Saints. He emphasizes the atrocities of the Saints' enemies while at the same time he allotted little space to the Saints' own excesses, shortcomings, or failures. The history even has some of the characteristics of the persecution literature of early Christianity, for names and places were encoded to protect prominent and exposed leaders.

Richards's writing sometimes suffers from the black-and-white syndrome. A man was either for the Kingdom or he was against it; he was either a friend or foe; saint or sinner; inspired of God or of the devil. There

was no attempt to see the Latter-day Saint persecutions through the eyes of the old settlers of Missouri and Illinois or to analyze the consequences of federal intervention in the affairs of the states who acquiesced or aided in the expulsion of the Saints. Both federal and state politicians were castigated and cursed for their Pilate-type responses. Dissenters and apostates were usually portrayed as bad characters with evil motives, with no indication of their good qualities, contributions to the Church, or the complex and difficult problems that led to their disaffection. On the other hand, the faithful elders seldom erred.

Theodor Mommsen once observed: "Those who have lived through historical events, as I have, begin to see that history is neither written nor made without love or hate."⁵⁷ This observation seems especially applicable to the writing of the early history of the Church by Richards and his associates. As they wrote the history, the strong positive feelings of these men toward the Church, the Prophet, and the Saints were often concomitant with feelings of disdain and animosity toward anti-Mormons and apostates. These deep feelings of the history's compilers are best expressed by George A. Smith, who had the responsibility of completing Richards work. As he completed the history of the Prophet's imprisonment and murder, he observed that it was "the most affecting piece of business I have ever undertaken" and that "it makes me feel like swearing and all that restrains me is that I am not philologist enough to command words as fervent as I could wish to do justice to my feelings."⁵⁸ It was only natural that the intense feelings of love, loyalty, sacrifice, and devotion which were engendered in the Latter-day Saint scribes and historians through their religious experiences and commitment should be carried over into their historical writing. Therefore it is not surprising that we also find their deep-seated indignation toward their oppressors and their strong contempt for former friends who had forsaken them or turned against them.

There is evidence of some historical relativism in Richards's writing. At its best, this process is an attempt to make the past relevant by interpreting it in relationship to contemporary experiences and values; at its worst, it is merely an effort by one generation to "play on the dead whatever tricks it finds necessary for its own peace of mind."⁵⁹ Richards wrote differently about such men as Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris after he was aware of their apostasy and excommunication; he injected the current, not past, feelings toward such men. Although plural marriage figured into many of the problems both from within and without the Church, Richards never mentions it. He was obligated to adhere to the strict contemporary policy of secrecy that was imposed on all who knew of the doctrine or its practice. Ironically a few years later when polygamy was denounced by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, George A.

Smith and B. H. Roberts had to collect and retroactively insert the missing information.

Because Richards and his assistants did not write history in a literary vacuum, their history should exhibit the same characteristics and flaws of other historical works of the period. Plagiarism, ghostwriting, the alteration of sources, a lack of documentation, too sparing a use of quotation marks, relativism, emotionalism, and a lack of balance and objectivity were all common features of nineteenth-century historical writing both within and without the Latter-day Saint Church.

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Sources located in the Archives Division, Church Historical Department. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, are used by permission.

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2. Claire Noall, *Intimate Disciple: A Portrait of Willard Richards, Apostle to Joseph Smith—Cousin of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1957), 40–41.
3. Noall, *Intimate Disciple*, 92–95.
4. Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (1901–36; reprint, Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1971), 1:53–54.
5. Willard Richards, Journal, 13 January 1842, Archives Division, Church Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).
6. Richards, Journal, 12 December 1841; and Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia* 1:54–55.
7. Richards, Journal, 21 December 1842.
8. Richards, Journal, 30 July 1843.
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11. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 4:470 (hereafter cited as *History of the Church*).
12. Richards, Journal, 13 December 1841.
13. Richards, Journal, 13 January 1842.
14. Richards, Journal, 21 December 1842.
15. Richards, Journal, 24–25 December 1842.
16. *History of the Church* 5:207.
17. *History of the Church* 5:253, 394; 6:66.
18. *History of the Church* 5:253.
19. *History of the Church* 5:298.
20. *History of the Church* 5:367.
21. Richards, Journal, 8 May 1843.

22. *History of the Church* 5:394. The “else” at the end was added to the original source in Joseph Smith’s journal.
23. *History of the Church* 6:66.
24. *History of the Church* 6:66. Smalling was a member of Zion’s Camp and a seventy, but his connection with the missing records has not been discovered.
25. Willard Richards to Mr. Moffat, 27 March 1844, LDS Church Archives.
26. George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1856.
27. *History of the Church* 7:325.
28. Richards, Journal, 18 January 1845: and Thomas Bullock, Journal, 25 January 1845, LDS Church Archives.
29. George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1856.
30. The journal of Heber C. Kimball is a good example of one of these altered sources.
31. Bullock, Journal, 3 April 1845.
32. *History of the Church* 7:389.
33. Manuscript History of the Church, A-1 (microfilm, CR 100, 102, reel 6) 42, LDS Church Archives.
34. George A. Smith to Wilford Woodruff, 21 April 1856.
35. Richards, Journal, 3 April 1845.
36. The duplicate history was designated A-2, B-2, C-2, etc. to correspond to each volume of the original.
37. Richards, Journal, 17 May July 6, 1845; and Historian’s Office Journal, 9 July 1845, LDS Church Archives.
38. Richards, Journal, 17 May–July 6, 1845, 3 January 1846.
39. Historian’s Office Journal, 20 January 1846.
40. Manuscript History of the Church, D-1, 1485.
41. Richards, Journal, 5 February 1846.
42. Richards, Journal, 6 May 1846.
43. Andrew Jensen, *Encyclopedia History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 338.
44. Richards, Journal, 2 April 1847.
45. A faint note in the Manuscript History of the Church, D-1, 1485, reads: “The records carried by T. Bullock from Winter Quarters to G.S.L. City in 1848.”
46. Manuscript History of the Church, D-1, 1486. Bullock confirmed this incident in his entry in the Historian’s Office Journal for this same day, which reads: “About 9 a.m. T B commenced removing heavy boxes of records down [to] W Rs office & unpacked 2 of them they not having been seen since T B assisted [to] fasten them down on 4 Feb 46.”
47. Manuscript History of the Church, D-1, 1486.
48. Manuscript History of the Church, D-1, 1485.
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50. Shriver, “American Historiography,” 399.
51. Shriver, “American Historiography,” 399.
52. For a more complete discussion of the development of nineteenth-century historiography and its shortcomings, see Howard C. Searle, “Early Mormon Historiography: Writing the History of the Mormons, 1830–1858” (Ph.D. diss., University of California Los Angeles, 1979), 465–73.

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54. *History of the Church* 2:115.

55. *History of the Church* 2:99–100, 103–105.

56. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 12th ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1924), 100.

57. Quoted by G. P. Gooch, *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, 2d ed., rev. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1952), 462.

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