

*Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness*, edited by John W. Welch and Larry E. Morris (Provo, Utah: The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2006)

This volume, edited by John W. Welch and Larry E. Morris, is a collection of seventeen essays originally published in *BYU Studies*, *FARMS Review*, and other publications. The volume was published in commemoration of Oliver Cowdery's two-hundredth birthday. The contributing scholars seek to detail the highs and lows of one of Mormonism's most important early leaders. Editors Welch and Morris have compiled a well-rounded biography of the man and his life.

Cowdery's many contributions to the Restoration are the focal point of this compilation. Richard Lloyd Anderson begins with a brief overview of Cowdery's life; Larry E. Morris covers Cowdery's Vermont years; John W. Welch and Royal Skousen each treat aspects of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and Brian Q. Cannon and others cover the restoration of the priesthood. This volume reminds readers how integral Cowdery was to the major events of the Restoration. As Joseph Smith's scribe and assistant, Cowdery was present when the Prophet received many of the great early revelations. He also received both the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods with Joseph, and transcribed nearly the whole Book of Mormon, as dictated by the Prophet. Along with Martin Harris and David Whitmer, Cowdery was privileged to view the gold plates and declare his witness of the record's truthfulness. Cowdery was later called to be one of the Church's first missionaries.

Although some controversy surrounds Cowdery's life and character, this compilation does not shy away from the debate. Larry E. Morris's essay

on the private character of Cowdery gives well-researched insight into the controversy. By relying on contemporary journals and correspondence, several of the authors, along with Morris, dispel many of the rumors surrounding Cowdery's past.

The volume also explores Cowdery's falling away from the Church. With the help of correspondence between Cowdery and his brother-in-law Phineas Young, the authors confirm that although Cowdery left the Church, he never denied his testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. Along with Cowdery's much-discussed falling away, Scott H. Faulring and others explore a lesser-known episode in Cowdery's life, but one that deserves greater attention—his reconciliation with the Church.

*Oliver Cowdery* is an important work for any student of early Mormon history. The insights of the contributors, along with the plain evidence into the actual events of his life, make this work one of the most informative accounts on the life and deeds of Oliver Cowdery.

—Reid L. Neilson and Paul Olson

*Before Zion: An Account of the Seventh Handcart Company*, by Allen C. Christensen (Springville, Utah: Council Press, 2004)

This book is Dr. Allen C. Christensen's contribution to the various histories of the ten handcart companies. He is the director of the Benson Agriculture and Food Institute at Brigham Young University and a descendant of some of the members of the Seventh Handcart Company.

The author points out in the first few sentences of the introduction that the Seventh Handcart Company is not as well known as other handcart companies, in part because "there is a paucity of written documentation on