

Guest Editor's Introduction

David J. Whittaker

The records of the Church's past, the role of those individuals who gathered and preserved them, and the works of historians who used these texts are all important topics for students of Latter-day Saint history. The analysis of such topics is known as historiography. In 1938 American historian Carl Becker defined historiography as that study

which records what men have at different times known and believed about the past, the use they have made, in the service of their interests and aspirations, of their knowledge and beliefs, and the underlying presuppositions which have made their knowledge seem to them relevant and their beliefs seem to them true.¹

The study of Latter-day Saint historiography is relatively new. In 1968 Leonard J. Arrington attempted the first overview of the topic,² and other studies have followed. These studies show that people who write about the past are themselves influenced by a variety of factors; thus historiography, as a branch of intellectual history, seeks to understand historians and their histories as products of the past. Such a study can provide a valuable dimension for anyone who studies history. It can teach us the strengths as well as the weaknesses that all works of history share. It can assist us in becoming wiser consumers of works of history and biography.

This special issue of *BYU Studies* focuses on various topics related to the writing of Latter-day Saint history. Eric Olsen discusses the Book of Mormon as a model for writing Latter-day Saint history. Dean Jessee examines the formulation of the written texts which contain Joseph Smith's discourses, while Howard Searle studies the work of Willard Richards as an early Church historian. Edwina Jo Snow and Michael Homer draw our attention to outside perceptions of Latter-day Saints: Snow studies the British travel literature, while Homer looks at Italian perceptions. Both suggest important sources and additional perspectives for students

David J. Whittaker is Curator of the Archives of the Mormon Experience, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

of Latter-day Saint history. James Allen and Jessie Embry take a fresh look at the beginnings of genealogy and family history in the Church, focusing particularly on the role of Susa Young Gates in the formation of the Utah Genealogical Society. Finally David Honey and Daniel Peterson offer some fresh perspectives on the current discussions of contemporary Latter-day Saint historiography. They suggest a variety of models to assist in our understanding of Latter-day Saint historical writing.

NOTES

¹ Carl Becker, "What Is Historiography?" *American Historical Review* 44 (October 1938): 22.

² Leonard J. Arrington, "The Search for Truth and Meaning in Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 3 (Summer 1968): 56–66.



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