

Review of *Eyewitness Accounts of the
Restoration*

MILTON V. BACKMAN, JR. *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration*. Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1984. 239 pp. \$12.95.

Reviewed by Larry C. Porter, director, Church history, Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University.

Milton Backman's *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* began with an intended single testimonium—that of Joseph Smith. Originally Backman intended to carefully harmonize Joseph's four dictated statements pertaining to the First Vision—the 1832 recital, the 1835 description, the 1838 account, and the 1842 Wentworth Letter. As the writing progressed, however, Backman felt it would be illuminating to present the accounts of Moroni's visitations. Further expansion brought in pertinent accounts of the eleven special witness to the Book of Mormon, thus broadening the book's initial base to include statements of key contemporary observers in the early Mormon movement.

The text is very "Joseph" oriented. Its primary content centers on the Prophet's own accounts of his interactions with the miraculous. Biographical information on those named in the accounts other than Joseph Smith is intentionally limited; a minimal background sketch on each of the witness merely identifies his role. Moreover, *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* is not a history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York and Pennsylvania. Backman places emphasis on the statements of individuals concerning specific events and not on the overall historical setting.

Inquirers increasingly desire to examine documents pertaining to early Mormonism in order to piece together the varied facets of its past. Understandably, many who would enjoy such a study do not have sufficient time or access to certain sources. Aware of this problem, Backman compiled sources capsulizing what is known on pertinent Restoration subjects and made them available in one account.

Backman's work is a well-formulated layman's manual to the sequence of important documents of Joseph Smith and other witnesses to the Restoration. After examining original sources on a given topic, he has integrated the contents to a single document. References used in the amalgamation of these sources have been cited for those who may wish to examine the original texts. In effect, this volume is an excellent index to the recurrent question of "Now where does that statement come from?"

The book's pervading assumption is that Joseph Smith was an accurate historian. Similarly, a comparison of the witnesses' respective statements reveals a minimum of conflict of detail in their accounts. This volume was unquestionably written to promote faith and not to expose conflict. As a

proselyting tool, it highlights the most powerful statements corroborating the Restoration.

Whenever a compilation is created there is also an automatic potential to fashion new problems. It is not difficult to place documents in chronological order, but it then becomes all too easy to change the meaning by lifting a phrase or sentence from the original text. There is always the pursuant problem of knowing just how much should be quoted versus how much should be trimmed. The author has succeeded in his efforts to remain true to the conceptual intent of the documents under scrutiny.

Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration does not contain a great deal more than that published before. However, its value lies in the gathering of scattered references. Those interested in examining the content of original documents which have been coordinated in a popular format will definitely enjoy the style utilized by Milton V. Backman Jr., in this singular volume. The continuity, the format arrangement, and the addition of new materials combine to frame a decidedly readable text.