



NEWSLETTER

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CHURCH HISTORY AND RECENT FORGERIES SYMPOSIUM

"Church History and Recent Forgeries," a symposium on the Mark Hofmann case was held Thursday, 6 August 1987, on the Brigham Young University campus. It was sponsored jointly by the BYU Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History, the Religious Studies Center, and the Department of History.

Discussants addressed topics ranging from police investigation of the evidence to the impact of the forgeries on Church history. There were several sessions and an evening keynote address by Elder Dallin H. Oaks, now printed in the October 1987 *Ensign*. Selected symposium papers will be published early in 1988 through the Smith Institute.

First Session: History and Faith

In his welcoming address, President Jeffrey R. Holland reminded historians to minimize sensationalism and to be accurate; any history of the restoration must be approached with faith and recognition of its "miraculous events." He said that by inventing evidence, Hofmann not only attacked this faith, but undermined scholarship as well.

William G. Hartley, of the Smith Institute, using the equation records + interpreter = history, noted good history requires good records and skilled historians. He said that Hofmann admitted in the just published confessions that he used Joseph Knight's account of the Hill Cumorah happenings to create the salamander version. But, to twist Joseph Knight's account to disparage Joseph Smith seems contradictory, because the Knight family stands as a stronger witness to Joseph Smith than

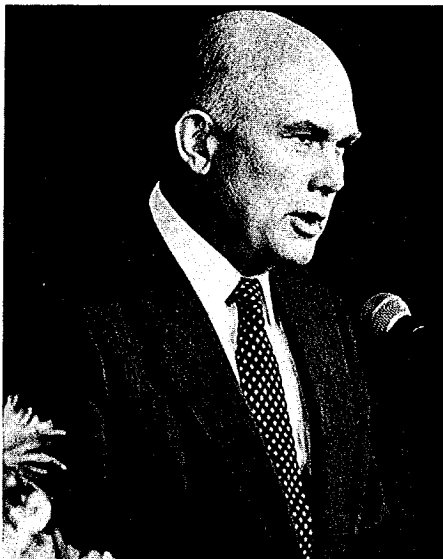


Photo courtesy of Daily Universe

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, keynote speaker at Church History and Recent Forgeries Symposium.

do the Three and Eight Witnesses. Hartley asserted that Church history neither makes nor breaks faith—it reinforces faith among believers, but doubters use it to disparage the Church.

James B. Allen, from the BYU department of history, warned historians against what he called the "aha" approach. When in the race to publish startling new information scholars too often fail to relate it to what is already known, the new find appears to call into question all that has been learned about the subject. History, by nature incomplete, and religion both seek truth and ultimately will not conflict, so when they appear to, we can suspend judgment till all the facts are in.

Second Session: Unraveling the Hofmann Case

Robert L. Stott of the Salt Lake county attorney's office, revealed a

chain of evidence as intriguing as an Agatha Christie novel. Components of the reconstructed bomb debris were traced to a Mike Hanson, a name which, in a series of clues, was found to be Hofmann's alias. Hofmann had sold documents and currency made from plates ordered by Hanson from a Denver engraving firm. So, investigators began to see a possible motive connecting forgery with the bombings.

George J. Throckmorton, of Independent Forensic Laboratories, described his early misgivings about the Salamander letter's authenticity and his largely unheeded efforts to get someone to take a closer look. He credited Paul Larson of *Utah Holiday* and Dean Jessee and documents Jessee provided for giving him credibility with investigators. It was an accumulation of clues that revealed the forgery, including the now famous "allegatoring" effect, or the cracking of the ink, caused by artificial accelerated aging, which all of Hofmann's documents contained.

Robert Stott spoke again, discussing why he thinks the scholars were deceived. He said they were not skeptical enough, did not do authentication work, did not seek provenance, and in some cases became Hofmann apologists. He told scholars they need to re-examine their methods and approaches.

Luncheon Session: Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions

Author Allen D. Roberts, whose book on the Hofmann case is due out by year's end, responded to the most frequently asked questions about it. To the question, "what was the extent of the forgeries," he said that there might be perhaps 1000 more forgeries yet to

detect, that only 20–30% of Hofmann-created documents were Mormon related. To the question of conspirators, he said despite Hofmann's expertise, the scope of the crime suggests accomplices.

Third Session: Why were Scholars Misled? What Can We Learn from This?

In response to these questions, David J. Whittaker, Archives, BYU Harold B. Lee Library, said that Church historians need freer access to existing documents in Church archives, even at the risk of making them available to scholars unsympathetic to the Church. He hoped this would make historians less vulnerable to forged documents which seem to fill the need for the specific information wanted.

Dean C. Jessee, BYU Smith Institute, whose book *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* included several Hofmann forgeries, detailed extensive efforts he and others made to establish provenance and to authenticate Hofmann documents: tests and verifications from experts Rendell, Lyter, Dibowski, Hamilton, Sommerford, and at the FBI labs. He commented that if it is hard to get the true picture in the Iran-Contra hearings even with abundant documentation and living witnesses, it is much harder when sources "filter down to us in disarray" from the past.

For the benefit of our readers, we include Richard L. Anderson's list of the Hofmann forgeries found in Jessee's book:

| | |
|---|--------|
| Note on Anthon Transcript, Feb. 1828 | p. 223 |
| To Emma Smith, March 6, 1833 | p. 277 |
| To Hyrum Smith, May 25, 1838 | p. 358 |
| Joseph Smith III Blessing, 17 Jan. 1844 | p. 565 |
| To Maria and Sarah Lawrence, 23 June 1844 | p. 596 |
| To Jonathan Dunham, June 27, 1844 | p. 616 |

Richard E. Turley, Jr., from the LDS Church Historical Department, enumerated the kinds of tests to which a document can be submitted—dating, physical and handwriting analysis, and provenance (i.e. the history of a document's ownership). The forgeries were undetected because few investors want to pay the high price for authentication,

especially when numerous documents are involved, as was the case with Hofmann.

Richard P. Howard, RLDS Church historian, noted that Hofmann violated both scholarly and personal friendship. The best protection against future deceptions of this nature is "provenance," the history of the document's ownership. And to protect against the disillusionment Hofmann fell prey to, difficult religious issues could be openly explored with honesty and faith. Critics and the youth, for example, might be less inclined to suspect the Church of sanitizing the truth.

Max J. Evans of the Utah State Historical Society explained that in LDS tradition and faith there is a strong need for belief—i.e., the Book of Mormon must be accepted on faith not on seeing the gold plates. But that is different from some historians' credulity and their desire for a reputation based on new finds. Since document verification is prohibitive in time and money, history of document ownership is perhaps the best protection. David Whittaker read excerpts from a statement by Charles Hamilton, a forgery expert who helped expose the fraudulent Hitler diary. Hamilton wrote that Hofmann took advantage of the tension between ecclesiastical leaders (who need to protect archives from critics) and historians (who want the facts). Other cultural traits eased Hofmann's deception: (1) the media-centered environment gives easy answers and minimizes analytic thinking; (2) a strong "collecting" urge reduces things to mere dollar value.

Fourth Session: What Was the Impact of Fraudulent Documents? Where Do We Stand Today?

Ronald R. Esplin, Director of the Smith Institute, responded to Stott's earlier comment (second morning session) that scholars had failed to conduct even the simplest test—finding the previous owners of various Hofmann documents. But, Esplin explained, historians had in fact repeatedly asked Hofmann about document sources. And one document dealer had even confirmed that he was 99% sure he had sold Hofmann a certain document.

Hofmann admitted to mercenary motives and skillfully tailoring the forgeries to fit well with what was already known about key areas of controversy in Church history. Those controversial questions, said Richard L.

Anderson, Religious Studies Center, still remain, some of which are dealt with in the Church's own documents. But there are plausible solutions to those issues which need not threaten faith. Joseph was part of this culture, so he might have been involved in money digging, for example; yet it is equally a fact that he was later a prophet who transcended that culture.

Ronald W. Walker, Smith Institute, agreed that historians were not as careless as charged in pursuing provenance. He himself had repeatedly asked Hofmann about the origin of the Salamander letter, and that Steven Christensen had spent at least \$5000 investigating it.

Marvin J. Hill, department of History, BYU, commented that Hofmann had little impact on him: as early as 1972, evidence had already led Hill to confirm Joseph Smith's involvement in money digging. Hill also said that historians should be more not less critical; if they had been more critical, Hofmann might have been detected sooner.

Leonard J. Arrington, Smith Institute, believed that the present state of Church historical writing is sound, that historians are careful scholars who do not rush to rewrite history based on one new find that disagrees with many other known facts. He expressed confidence in the LDS historians to write histories that are both accurate and loyal to the faith.

Evening Session

In the keynote address, Elder Dallin H. Oaks documented the media's "character assassination" of the Church. The Los Angeles Times' news coverage, for example, was vociferously inaccurate and incomplete. And it failed to corroborate the facts of its informant, John Dart (ultimately found to be Hofmann himself). But when the supposed "information" was found to be false, it failed to release sufficient corrective stories. Months before the bombings, the Church had made public a number of documents sold to them by Hofmann, so the charge of Church document suppression was false. In addition, he defended the Church's policy of trust and documents-acquisition which explains Church purchase of some Hofmann material.

Jan Shippo, professor of History and American Studies at Purdue and Indiana University, was introduced by Donald Q. Cannon as a scholar and friend of the Church. Discarding her

prepared speech, she instead commented on the day's proceedings. Much ground had been covered, she said, and, despite the Hofmann experience, she hoped that LDS scholars would not discontinue the study of folk magic and early Mormonism's cultural setting.

Richard L. Bushman, department of history at the University of Delaware, likewise setting aside his prepared talk, aptly summarized and responded to the lectures. Historians should exercise care not to damage testimonies, yet at the same time to be responsibly faithful to facts and truth.

A worthwhile symposium, it afforded an opportunity not only for information but for reflection. As Richard L. Anderson observed, one problem with Hofmann's forgeries is that they do not acknowledge all the facts of the whole picture, namely that, yes, Joseph was part of his culture and human. But equally factual and more important, he was a prophet who rose above both and whose nature was in process of transformation. None of Hofmann's "documents" capture this historical fact. As Dr. Anderson noted, Hofmann imputed to Joseph his own self-interested motives. For example, in an 1844 letter to General Dunham, Hofmann has Joseph call for rescue from Liberty jail. This motive reflects Hofmann, the man; it is precisely what Joseph the prophet would not have done.

The danger of fabricating documents is worse only by degree than reading into existing ones inaccurate motives. Einsteinian physics recognizes the limitation of certain facts. History might well do likewise. To supposedly show LDS history's "darker" side, Hofmann had to invent it.

VICTOR L. LUDLOW APPOINTED TO THE CENTER

Victor L. Ludlow, associate professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University, has recently been appointed to replace Richard L. Anderson as Director of Bible Studies for the Religious Studies Center.

Born in Spanish Fork, Utah, he served his mission for the Church in



Newly appointed Director of Bible Studies, Victor L. Ludlow



Charles D. Tate, Jr., the new Publications Editor for the Religious Studies Center.

CENTER APPOINTS NEW PUBLICATIONS EDITOR

Central Germany, from 1962–1964. He returned to the Germany Frankfurt Mission as Mission President from 1983 to 1986.

Between missions, Dr. Ludlow earned his B.A. in history from BYU with high honors in 1968, and his PhD in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies as a Danforth Fellow from Brandeis University in 1979.

Since joining the BYU faculty in 1972, Dr. Ludlow has served on many committees and garnered several awards.

He has worked on such projects as the *Chiasmus of Isaiah*, and *A Synopsis of Isaiah*, and contributed comments and footnotes on Exodus for the new LDS Bible. His own books include *Unlocking the Old Testament*, and *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet*. Most recently he contributed a chapter in *The New Testament and the Latter-day Saints* entitled, "Isaiah as Taught by New Testament Apostles" and a chapter entitled "Scribes and Scriptures" in *Studies in Scriptures*, a volume on the Book of Mormon. He has also published numerous responses to "I Have a Question" and other articles in the *Ensign*.

In his new position as director of Bible Studies in the Religious Studies Center, Dr. Ludlow will be planning a symposium on the Bible for Fall of 1989, focusing on the transmission, translation and transmutation of scripture from ancient prophets to modern day. He will also be coordinating and assisting in the writing of research projects dealing with the Bible.

Dr. Ludlow presently lives in Provo with his wife, Virginia, and their six children.

Charles D. Tate, Jr., professor of English at Brigham Young University, was recently appointed to replace S. Kent Brown as Assistant General Director-Publications in the Religious Studies Center. He has been singularly prepared for this position. For 16 years Dr. Tate edited *BYU STUDIES*, the university's scholarly, quarterly journal. He was one of the founding editors of *Abstracts of English Studies* in 1958, and he still serves on the editorial board and as a field editor for that journal. He has also edited or been the associate editor for more than 10 books.

Born and raised in Logan, Utah, he received his bachelor's and master's degrees in English from Utah State University in 1954 and 1958 and his Ph.D. in English from the University of Colorado in 1966. He also served a mission for the Church to the Netherlands, 1949–51, and was president of the Missouri St. Louis Mission, 1983–86.

Dr. Tate has had varied teaching experience. In addition to teaching for 27 years at BYU, he taught two years at Olympus HS in SLC, one year as a graduate student at Utah State, and three years at the University of Colorado. He has taken time out to teach one year at BYU-Hawaii as an exchange professor.

Dr. Tate and his wife Dianne have seven children.

THIRD ANNUAL BOOK OF MORMON SYMPOSIUM

On 11 October 1987, Elder Dallin H. Oaks delivered the keynote address at a BYU 16-Stake Fireside, officially ending the Third Annual Book of Mormon Symposium sponsored by The Religious Studies Center. His talk was titled, "Free Agency and Freedom."

Elder Oaks followed two days of speakers who presented papers dealing with 2 Nephi in the Book of Mormon. A report of Elder Oaks' address, as well as coverage of the other speakers, is planned for the next newsletter.

Special Note: This Symposium was combined with the Sperry Symposium normally held in January; consequently, there will *not* be a Sperry Symposium this coming January.

UPCOMING EVENTS

March 1988 - Lectures on Faith
Symposium

RELIGIOUS STUDIES CENTER PUBLICATIONS

The following Religious Studies Center books are available at LDS bookstores or they can be ordered directly from Bookcraft, Box 25777, Salt Lake City, Utah 84125-9971 (please include your check with your order and Bookcraft will prepay the books back to you):

Books in Print:

Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints - \$12.95
Isaiah and the Prophets - \$7.95
Literature of Belief - \$8.95
Reflections on Mormonism - \$6.95
Scriptures for the Modern World - \$7.95
Supporting Saints - \$12.95
The Call of Zion: The Story of the First Welsh Mormon Emigration - \$10.95
The Joseph Smith Translation - \$9.95
The Words of Joseph Smith - \$10.95

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