

EARLY MORMON SOURCES

1830-1900

Lyman D. Platt

There is an increasing amount of material being discovered and/or compiled for the early Mormon history period of 1830-1846. Many projects are being worked on by individuals because of their love of history, for professional reasons, or in some cases, for profit. Some of these efforts are noted herein.

Jim Smith, BYU, is working on a social history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, using many early records from England, Nauvoo, Iowa and Utah, to compile a demographic analysis of the Mormon population during the early period.

Milton V. Backman and Keith Perkins, BYU, are working on identifying those individuals associated with the Kirtland period. During the last few years they have added many new names to their studies and have covered most of the obvious contemporary sources in this project. Close to 1,500 of the approximately 2,000 Saints who lived in Kirtland have been identified by them. With the assistance of Keith Perkins and Susan Easton [Black], brother Backman compiled *A Profile of Latter-day Saints of Kirtland, Ohio and Members of Zion's Camp, 1830-1839*, published in 1983. He says in the preface "Since there are no complete membership records dating back to this early period, researchers at BYU have been attempting to identify individuals who joined the church prior to the exodus west. One phase of this study has been the identification of Latter-day Saints who gathered to Kirtland during that decade (the 1830s)" The many-faceted problem of this study is discussed further in his preface to this excellent work. The appendices are very valuable for anyone doing research in this period.

Marvin Wiggins, BYU, has published a 75,000 name index of Mormon biographies from 1820 to the present, using only published sources.

Clark Johns, BYU, has put together over 4,000 affidavits of Missouri Saints with some biographical details.

Davis Bitton has published a very important *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies*.

Hyrum L. Andrus and Richard E. Bennett edited *Mormon Manuscripts to 1846: A Guide to the Holdings of the Harold B. Lee Library*. This study is excellent as to its content and the research involved, but the index is extremely bad, having an error rate of over 25%.

Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook have edited *Far West Record* which contains some valuable, although undocumented, biographies of Missouri Saints in its biographical appendix.

Don Ender, LDS Church Museum, is making a systematic source search for the period up to 1850, church-wide, to compile some statistical data on the early members. He has done more than anyone else, to date, in identifying the branches of the church by locality, by conference, and population-wise.

Jim Kimball, LDS Church Historical Department, is computerizing Nauvoo records, principally land records.

Michel Call, private genealogist, has organized the Mormon Pioneer Genealogy Library, containing 50,000 pedigree charts and family group sheets. An index to the collection is now available in print. It covers the time period identified in this article's title, plus a later period. It is limited in the sense that it deals principally with families who have submitted numbers of family group records to the Family History Library. Michel has formed a non-profit organization and is beginning to place copies of his collection in selected libraries. He feels this will result in a 75% savings in time and effort by the interrelated families of the church, as well as by many others.

A similar project is being carried out by Richard Horsley of Provo. His effort is not as far advanced as Michel's; however, he is including a broader scope of families in his studies.

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Susan Ward Easton Black, BYU, has published a number of guides to early Mormon records within the last few years: cemeteries, crossing the plains, Nauvoo marriages, etc. Her main emphases initially was to identify select groups within the early period and insure that the temple work had been completed for all of them. She is now publishing a series entitled *Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. It covers the period 1830-1850 and includes vital statistics, church ordinations, and biographical information. The computer program she initially chose was cumbersome and has created a lot of bulk, which makes the index somewhat difficult to use. Her work is to be complimented, however, because of its attempt to provide accurate details and references.

The LDS Reference section of the Family History Library has revived the Early Church Information File begun years ago. The original had poor quality control. There are many cards in this card index file that do not have proper references noted so as to find the original records. The present staff is adding cards to this file to the tune of five to ten thousand a month. The present quality control seems to be adequate. They are pulling information from any source on the time period 1830-1914. They have added approximately 600,000 new entries since opening the index again. The present file contains around 665,000 cards. They have used over 700 sources so far, pinpointing many biographical references, genealogical references, etc. This is a world-wide index of church members.

The LDS Reference section is also working on a Mormon Subject-Locality File and at the present time is making an audit of branch, ward, mission, district, and conference records to determine exactly what is available. They are preparing detailed content sheets for each jurisdiction. This material is available through correspondence or by personal inquiry.

There are numerous projects going on at the Family History Library, at the LDS Historical Department, and at Brigham Young University by students, employees, and private individuals, most of them limited to the study of a family or a person. With the revolution in private computers, there will be incredible amounts of new material made available within the next few years that these larger studies, as noted above, will continue to pull from.

For over twenty-five years, I have collected, studied, and indexed materials in an effort to better understand what has really happened in Mormon history. Under the auspices of the Early Mormon Research Institute,

which was created to help analyze and produce information from my records, we are beginning a magazine, called *The Nauvoo Journal*. It is expected that with the publishing of this magazine, many research problems will begin to be solved by bringing to light previously unknown and little-used records, by correcting false research and traditions, by indexing of other difficult records, and by publishing many sources that are inaccessible to hundreds of interested family historians and genealogists. No claim to having all the answers is made as we go public with this information. However, the time has come to begin sharing the data.

In preparation for this task, the collection of about 35,000 names compiled by the Institute has been computerized and indexed for easy reference. The 1851 census of Utah has been re-indexed by both individual surnames and by place of birth. Over 100 marriage sources for early Utah have been computerized. All major studies compiled by other individuals and organizations have been acquired for integration in the computer indexes of the Institute. Hundreds of families have been studied and their family groupings have been reworked and corrected according to the information obtained from the above sources. Chronological indexes of baptisms, births, marriages, deaths, and other events in early Mormon history have been initiated. A systematic rebuilding of early branch histories has begun with over 500 branches, and many of their former members, having been identified.

A rewriting of Mormon history from the standpoint of the individuals involved is well underway. Much remains to be done, particularly in the area of finding those sources still in the possession of Mormon and non-Mormon families. No systematic effort has ever been undertaken to do this by any organization. Some work has been done by BYU and by the Historical Department of the church, but for the most part, these two entities have been recipients of information, rather than collectors. Much is available for the asking. The Institute, as it grows, will begin to collect this data, input it into its databases and then the original records, if these have been obtained, and donate them to the appropriate repositories, family organizations, etc.

[Any person having information to add to Dr. Platt's study may contact him at 316 West 500 North, St. George, UT 84770.]