

## Document Dealer Confesses

On January 23, document dealer Mark W. Hofmann pleaded guilty in Salt Lake City to two counts of second-degree murder and two counts of felony theft by deception.

The murder charges stemmed from the 1985 bombing deaths of Steven Christensen and Kathleen Sheets. The theft by deception counts related to Hofmann's confessed forgery of the so-called "salamander letter," supposedly written by Martin Harris, and the sale of the so-called "McLellin collection" to a Salt Lake City coin dealer.

Following Hofmann confession, the Church issued the following statement:

"On behalf of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its leaders and members, we extend again our heartfelt sympathies to the families and associates of all whose lives have been so deeply affected by the bombings and related events of the past months. It is our hope that the healing process may now be hastened for those who have suffered from these tragedies.

"Church leaders were not involved and were not consulted in the plea bargaining that culminated in today's judicial proceeding.

"The Church, its early leaders, its doctrine, and its members have been abused by much of the commentary about the meaning and impact of the questioned documents which are at the center of these tragic events.

"Like other document collectors throughout the nation, the Church has relied on competent authorities in document acquisition and with the others has been a victim of the fraudulent activities which have now been acknowledged in the courtroom. As earlier announced, the Church acquired forty-eight documents directly from Mark W. Hofmann—seven documents for a total cash purchase price of \$57,100, and forty-one others, less valuable, by donation or trade.

"The events of this day confirm the statements made by Church leaders throughout this regrettable episode. For example, when the Church accepted the gift of the purported letter from Martin Harris to W. W. Phelps, the so-called 'salamander letter,' President Gordon B. Hinckley, then the Second Counselor in the First Presidency, cautioned:

"No one, of course, can be certain that Martin Harris wrote the document. However, at this point we accept the judgment of the examiner that there is no indication that it is a forgery. This does not preclude the possibility that it may have been forged at a time when the Church had many enemies. It is, however, an interesting document of the times.

"Actually, the letter has nothing to do with the authenticity of the Church. The real test of the faith which both Martin Harris and W. W. Phelps had in Joseph Smith and his work is found

in their lives, in the sacrifice they made for their membership in the Church, and in the testimonies which they bore to the end of their lives.

“Martin Harris died in 1875 in Clarkston, Utah, in full fellowship in the Church and bearing a fervent testimony of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon. W. W. Phelps passed away in Salt Lake City in 1872 as an active high priest with a distinguished career of Church service.”