

Speaking Today

## Recent Events Involving Church History and Forged Documents

By Elder Dallin H. Oaks  
*Of the Quorum of the Twelve*

From a talk given at Brigham Young University, 6 August 1987.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak for the record on a number of issues that have been of immense interest to scholars, Church members, and the general public over the last several years.

The public is intensely interested when someone commits the horrible crime of murder by bombing. When the bombing murders of 15 October 1985 were shown to be involved somehow with the sale of early Mormon history documents, the news interest was global. When it was revealed many months later that the murders were committed in an effort to conceal the fact that these Church history documents were clever forgeries, the whole episode achieved epic proportions.

As this complicated matter unfolded, there were many different peaks of interest, ranging from the techniques of forging ancient documents to the mind patterns of a master deceiver. What interested me most was the fact that these forgeries and their associated lies grew out of their author's deliberate attempt to rewrite the early history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and that so many persons and organizations seized on this episode to attempt to discredit the Church and its leaders. I was saddened but not surprised that the news coverage of the truth about the forgeries and lies of Mark Hofmann was small by comparison with the earlier trumpeting of the claims that his newly discovered documents destroyed faith, compromised Church leaders, and rocked the foundations of the Church.

In the course of this episode, we have seen some of the most sustained and intense LDS church-bashing since the turn of the century. In a circumstance where The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could not say much without interfering with the pending criminal investigation and prosecution, the Church and its leaders have been easy marks for assertions and innuendo ranging from charges of complicity in murder to repeated recitals that the Church routinely acquires and suppresses Church history documents in order to deceive its members and the public. In the hands of clever writers and cartoonists, the mythical salamander proved a most effective instrument to pique public interest and to blacken the reputation of faithful persons, living and dead.

## Alleged Suppression of Documents

I will comment first on the charge of suppression.

One week after the bombings, in an effort to answer public questions, the Church made known that it had acquired “forty-some documents” from Hofmann “by purchase, donation, or trade.” (Gordon B. Hinckley, remarks at 23 Oct. 1985 press conference.) The Church operates under a divine mandate to acquire and preserve the documents and artifacts that show its history, and these acquisitions were part of that effort. In succeeding weeks, an exhaustive inventory of the Church’s huge collections revealed the extent of Hofmann’s transactions with the Church. These follow-up details were immediately disclosed to the authorities making this criminal investigation.

In the midst of these efforts to inform its members and to aid in the pending investigation, the Church’s openness on its dealings with Hofmann was used against it. For example, the *New York Times Magazine* of 12 January 1986 states:

“Hinckley said at a press conference that, starting in 1980, he had purchased about 40 documents from Hofmann. Only a few of them have been made public; others are in a church vault. Whether they cast any new light on the church’s past is not known.” (Pp. 43, 46.)

What President Hinckley said was that he had purchased *two* documents, and Church History Department personnel had acquired the rest. Furthermore, the unknown documents were mostly innocuous, unknown not because they were hidden in a vault—they were not—but unknown because they were unimportant.

During this same month of January 1986, the Church turned all of its Hofmann-acquired documents over to the prosecutors, at their request. As a result, the Church could not make its Hofmann documents public to answer these innuendos of suppression without seeming to try to influence or impede the criminal investigation.

On 11 April 1986, after months of searching through its records and collections, the Church published a complete list of the forty-eight documents and groups of court records then known to have been acquired from Mark Hofmann. That list spoke for itself: It was a mixture of the already-published, the intriguing, the routine, and the trivial. Now, over a year later, we know that some of the forty-eight are forgeries, because they were named in the criminal charges and confessed by Hofmann during his questioning by prosecutors.

But Hofmann handled many documents that were not specifically listed in the criminal charges and covered in the subsequent questioning. So, like most owners of Hofmann-handled documents, the Church is still unsure how many of such documents are forgeries and which are genuine. As of this date, the Church does not even have possession of all of the forty-eight it acquired. The prosecution has not yet returned the last thirteen, which include the documents of greatest interest to the public.

Despite the Church’s publication of a complete list of its acquisitions from Hofmann, the allegations of suppression continued. For example, an 11 February 1987 *New York Times* feature states:

“According to investigators, the church leaders purchased from Mr. Hofmann and then hid in a vault a number of 19th-century letters and other documents that cast doubt on the church’s official version of its history.”

This kind of character assassination attributed to anonymous “investigators” has been all too common throughout the media coverage of this whole event. One wonders why the *New York Times* would not mention in its long article that almost a year earlier the Church had published a detailed list of its Hofmann acquisitions? Is the *Times*’ motto still “All the news that’s fit to print,” or has it become “All the news that fits a particular perspective”?

Also conveniently omitted from mention in most of the repetitious media recitals of the Church’s “suppression” of documents is the fact that the most prominent Hofmann documents used to attack the origins of the Church—including Martin Harris’ so-called Salamander letter, Joseph Smith’s treasure-hunting letter to Josiah Stowel, and the Joseph Smith III blessing—were all made public by the Church many months before the bombings triggered intense public interest in this subject. We should also remember the Church’s repeated cautions about the authenticity of these documents. For example, President Gordon B. Hinckley said this about the Martin Harris letter:

“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.” (News Release, 28 Apr. 1985.)

Another document that has been headlined in these charges of suppression is the so-called Oliver Cowdery History. This mythical manuscript has been the subject of hundreds of column inches of newspaper speculation and innuendo because an anonymous source claimed to have seen it in the Church’s possession. The so-called “deep throat” source also claimed that the manuscript’s contents were embarrassing to the Church—specifically, that it was Alvin Smith, not Joseph, who found the golden plates. This was the basis for the critics’ reasoning that the Church had an Oliver Cowdery History and was suppressing it.

In a few minutes I will describe the conclusion of this particular allegation of suppression. Suffice it to say now that as far as we were able to determine in the months that followed, the so-called Oliver Cowdery History was a figment of someone’s fertile imagination. Mark Hofmann has now admitted that he was the one who invented the story. Hofmann’s claim that the Church possessed a damaging document acquired a life of its own because too many unsophisticated persons were quick to repeat and embellish sensational rumors hurtful to the Church, and too many newspapers and television stations were eager to trumpet the unauthenticated claims of an anonymous informant.

Are documents ever acquired by the Church and then closed to the public? Of course. This is true of most large archives, as any well-informed person should be aware. Like other archives, the Church Historical Department closes or restricts access to certain documentary materials it acquires from outside sources for such reasons as the following:

1. The donor has directed that access be restricted or prohibited for a certain period.

2. The contents are confidential. When materials are written or statements are made with the understanding that the communication will not be available to the public for a certain period of time, the Church Historical Department respects that understanding.
3. The contents are private. The laws and ethics of privacy forbid custodians from revealing information that may invade the privacy of living individuals. Examples would include diaries or minutes that discuss the private affairs of living persons. In addition, our belief in life after death causes us to extend this principle to respect the privacy of persons who have left mortality but live beyond the veil. Descendants who expect future reunions with deceased ancestors have a continuing interest in their ancestors' privacy and good name.

These same considerations apply to official Church documents, such as the minutes of confidential meetings and Church courts.

## Other Questions

Why did Mark Hofmann have such ready access to certain Church officials?

For seven years Mark Hofmann was an active dealer in LDS Church documents, most of a routine nature but some of intense public interest. In contrast to media assertions, such as the *New York Times Magazine* statement that “high officials of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were doing a brisk business with Hofmann” (12 Jan. 1986, p. 43), almost all of his contacts with the Church were with the professional personnel in the Church Historical Department.

Parenthetically, I remind you that all of these documents were listed publicly over a year ago, together with their total cash purchase price of \$57,100, plus traded documents of undetermined value. Despite this disclosure, some persons perpetuated the rumor that the Church's acquisitions from Hofmann exceeded a million dollars. A recent newspaper estimate fixed his total transactions with Utah and Arizona buyers and lenders at more than \$1.5 million. The Church's acquisitions were obviously a small part of that total.

Church *leaders* made the purchase or received the donation of only three documents from Hofmann or his intermediary. Acting for the Church, President Gordon B. Hinckley purchased the Joseph Smith letter to Josiah Stowel from Hofmann. At about that same time, President Hinckley received from him as a gift to the Church a draft letter of Thomas Bullock, dated 27 January 1865. Third, Hofmann sold the Martin Harris–W. W. Phelps letter to Steven F. Christensen. Some months later, after Christensen completed his research and authentication, he delivered this letter to President Hinckley as a gift to the Church. Church Historical Department personnel were fully informed about all of these transactions.

Hofmann's other contacts with Church leaders were as follows. His first contact occurred when Church Historical Department personnel brought him to the office of various Church leaders in 1980 in connection with Hofmann's first “find”—the so-called “Anthon Manuscript.” At that time, Hofmann loaned this document to the Church for examination. The Historical Department later made a trade to acquire it. The following year, the same

sequence occurred with the document known as the Joseph Smith III blessing.

As a result of Hofmann's involvement in these interesting acquisitions, he was able to meet with President Hinckley on several subsequent occasions. As President Hinckley explained publicly, on these occasions Hofmann attempted to interest the Church in other acquisitions, but President Hinckley was not interested. During this same period, President Hinckley met in his office with hundreds of other visitors on scores of different matters related to the Church and its work. Hofmann's occasional visits were only incidental to President Hinckley's larger responsibilities.

As far as I am aware, Hofmann met with only two other Church leaders. Steven Christensen brought Hofmann to meet Elder Hugh Pinnock, as Elder Pinnock has already explained in a public statement. And Hofmann met with me for ten minutes on 15 October 1985, as I have already explained in a public statement.

Some have asked, how was Mark Hofmann able to deceive Church leaders?

As everyone now knows, Hofmann succeeded in deceiving many: experienced Church historians, sophisticated collectors, businessmen-investors, national experts who administered a lie detector test to Hofmann, and professional document examiners, including the expert credited with breaking the Hitler diary forgery. But why, some still ask, were his deceptions not detected by the several Church leaders with whom he met?

In order to perform their personal ministries, Church leaders cannot be suspicious and questioning of each of the hundreds of people they meet each year. Ministers of the gospel function best in an atmosphere of trust and love. In that kind of atmosphere, they fail to detect a few deceivers, but that is the price they pay to increase their effectiveness in counseling, comforting, and blessing the hundreds of honest and sincere people they see. It is better for a Church leader to be occasionally disappointed than to be constantly suspicious.

The Church is not unique in preferring to deal with people on the basis of trust. This principle of trust rather than suspicion even applies to professional archives. During my recent visit to the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California, I was interested to learn that they have no formal procedures to authenticate the many documents they acquire each year. They say they consider it best to function in an atmosphere of trust and to assume the risk of the loss that may be imposed by the occasional deceiver.

## Abuses in Media Coverage

In some media coverage of this episode, there is evidence that religious prejudice is alive and well in many newsrooms and that Mormon-bashing is still popular and apparently profitable.

For example, consider the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* story of 29 March 1987, about two months after Mark Hofmann confessed to two murders and two specific instances of forgery. This two-part series is titled "The White Salamander Murders." The first part publishes the full text of the so-called Salamander Letter and describes the contents of other Church history documents allegedly found by Hofmann. It revels in the way their contents, as it

claims, “shook The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” (P. 1.) “The church’s closely guarded history,” the article says, “had been turned into something comic and humiliating.” (P. 12.) But in all of the ten pages of this first weekly installment, this prominent newspaper coyly refrains from telling its readers that these “Church-shaking” documents were forgeries. In an inexplicable and reprehensible breach of journalistic integrity, that disclosure was delayed until the second installment, a week later. Does dramatic suspense justify such concealment? It does for fiction, but when the reputations and faith of real people and real institutions are at stake, especially when thousands who read the first installment will not read the second one a week later, that kind of delay is unjustified.

Next, consider the treatment of the Church in the 30 March 1986 London *Sunday Times Magazine*. An article replete with inaccuracies touches a new low with this editorializing in a caption to pictures of buildings on Temple Square, a statue of the Christus, and a portion of the Salamander Letter:

“But this rich and powerful institution is built on shaky doctrinal foundations, further undermined by the Salamander letter (left). Now, the authenticity of the letter itself has been questioned.” (P. 30.)

Notice how the questioned authenticity of the Salamander Letter was cleverly phrased to imply that the questions being posed about its authenticity were an additional blow to the Church, rather than a removal of the alleged undermining of its foundations.

The *Los Angeles Times Magazine* used this same kind of phraseology in its “White Salamander” feature. Its summary states: “The church elders who accepted as authentic his startling ‘discoveries’ soon found themselves mired in deceit, and in a scheme that would rock all Mormondom, culminating in a series of gruesome bombings.” (P. 1.) Note how this deft phrasing implies that “the church elders” were involved in the deceit and bombings perpetrated by Hofmann.

For a few weeks after the bombs went off in October 1985, the *Salt Lake Tribune*’s news coverage of the relationship of the Church and its leaders to the bombings was like a media feeding-frenzy. Although the *Tribune* news coverage became more cautious after a time, as I will note later, its Letters to the Editor section remained open, as usual, to the most extreme fulminations of religious ridicule and hatred.

While various newspaper writers were accusing the Church of suppression of historical documents, some of these same papers were actually involved in perpetrating a cover-up of their own.

As noted earlier, one of the most popular charges against the Church was its alleged suppression of the so-called Oliver Cowdery History, said to contain an account of the discovery of the golden plates sharply at odds with the Church’s official history. John Dart, a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, published several articles describing the appearance and contents of the Oliver Cowdery History, based on information given to him by an undisclosed informant. Many other newspapers followed Dart in disseminating the statements of this anonymous source and in charging the Church with a cover-up to deceive its members and the public.

Unable to confront its accuser, the Church could only search its extensive records and huge archives to try to find the history in question or to find evidence that it did not exist. After a search of many months, covering every possible location and exhausting every possible lead, the Church issued a statement on 16 October 1986 denying possession of an Oliver Cowdery History. The statement suggested that whoever launched this rumor might be trying to describe a manuscript draft of Joseph Smith's published history of the Church, although this manuscript had no reference to the damaging subjects supposedly in the Oliver Cowdery History. (For a thorough treatment of the manuscript draft, see Richard L. Anderson's illuminating article, "The Alvin Smith Story: Fiction and Fact," in the August 1987 issue of the *Ensign*.)

On 17 October 1986, the day following the Church's denial of the Oliver Cowdery History, the *Los Angeles Times* carried an article by John Dart reporting that the Church had denied the allegations of the *Times*' "source." The article rehashed the old allegations, but still did not reveal the identity of the source.

That same day, the *Salt Lake Tribune* was more forthright. They published a candid article revealing that the "deep throat" whose anonymous description of the Oliver Cowdery History had provided the *Los Angeles Times* and other papers with the major source for their accusations that the Church was suppressing damaging documents was none other than accused forger and murderer Mark Hofmann! (Dawn Tracy, "Hofmann Told Others He Was Shown Secret LDS History," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 Oct. 1986, p. C-13.) We now know that Mark Hofmann was adept at planting lies to discredit the Church, and that many organizations and persons have been his witting or unwitting accomplices in that effort.

After the *Salt Lake Tribune* identified Mark Hofmann as the *Los Angeles Times* informant, concerned readers wrote letters to the editor of the *Times*. They appealed to fairness, journalistic ethics, and the need for assurance that the press was not being exploited for selfish purposes. They asked the *Los Angeles Times* to print the known truth so its readers could evaluate the credibility of the paper's articles about the Oliver Cowdery history and the Church's alleged suppression of it. None of these letters was printed. Five months later, the *Times*' extensive two-part magazine series on what it called "The White Salamander Murders" twice mentioned the alleged Oliver Cowdery History and its supposedly damaging disclosures. But nowhere in the 257 column inches of this extensive coverage did the *Times* reveal the fact that their source on this important question was confessed killer and forger Mark Hofmann. As late as April 1987, the *Los Angeles Times* was still stonewalling the issue, concealing the truth from its readers.

In the transcripts released 31 July 1987, Hofmann admitted that he fabricated the story about the Oliver Cowdery History, lying in his interview with a *Los Angeles Times* reporter. The next day the *Times* finally revealed the facts to its readers. "Obviously, like many others who had dealings with Hofmann, we were seriously misled," their article admits. "In retrospect, it's clear we erred in publishing it without verifying Hofmann's story with another source." ("Tried to Kill Self, Mormon Artifacts Dealer Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Aug. 1987, p. 29.) So ends a journalistic injustice against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A newspaper that has offended with a succession of big bangs tries to back out with a small

whimper.

## Factual Clarifications

Testimony at Hofmann's preliminary hearing quoted the late Steven F. Christensen as saying that, at the request of Church officials, threats were communicated to Hofmann that he would be excommunicated if he did not pay his \$185,000 loan from First Interstate Bank. (See *Salt Lake Tribune*, 23 Apr. 1986, p. B-1.) Did President Gordon B. Hinckley, Elder Dallin H. Oaks, or Elder Hugh W. Pinnock threaten Hofmann with excommunication?

No such threats were made. These allegations of threats of excommunication were not answered at the time they were made because the case was still pending, and it was deemed undesirable to make out-of-court comments on the testimony of various witnesses. Now, I am authorized to say in behalf of Elder Hugh W. Pinnock that he made no threat of excommunication or other Church discipline against Hofmann in his discussions about the payment of the loan.

I am also authorized to say in behalf of President Gordon B. Hinckley, and I likewise say for myself, that neither of us ever discussed the possibility of Church discipline of Hofmann with Hofmann or his associates or with anyone else. As far as we can determine, no Church official ever made any threats of excommunication against Hofmann for nonpayment of debts, directly or indirectly.

Did the Church seek to obtain the so-called McLellin Collection in order to keep it from public scrutiny?

No! At the decision-making level, Church authorities consistently made clear that the Church was not interested in purchasing the so-called McLellin Collection or in loaning money for its acquisition by another person. In the circumstances that prevailed in June 1985, to have the Church involved in the acquisition of the papers of a prominent opponent of the Church would simply fuel the then-current speculation that the Church was seeking to acquire the McLellin Collection in order to suppress it.

In his interviews with the prosecutors, Mark Hofmann has recited conversations he said he had with President Hinckley, claiming the President asked him to help the Church purchase the McLellin Collection directly or indirectly. President Hinckley has denied this. I urge everyone to be thoughtful about whom they will believe in conflicts of this nature—General Authorities whose statements about this whole episode have been confirmed by all subsequent investigations, or Mark Hofmann, who is renowned for his record of deceit and his efforts to discredit the Church and its leaders.

In subsequent communications, Hofmann told Elder Pinnock and Steven F. Christensen on 28 June 1985 that he (Hofmann) intended to acquire the McLellin Collection in order to give it to the Church. As revealed in public statements shortly after the bombings, Hofmann told Elder Pinnock some time in September that in order to settle debts he was being forced to sell the McLellin Collection and therefore would not be able to give it to the Church. Elder

Pinnock thereupon brought the purported collection to the attention of David E. Sorensen, president of the Church's Canada Halifax Mission, to see if he would be interested in acquiring it as an investment that could possibly be donated to the Church at some future time.

David E. Sorensen telephoned me to find out what I knew about the McLellin Collection. I told him I had never seen the collection, but if there was a collection of the papers of this man, it would probably have items of significant historical interest to the Church. I said that it would be desirable for such a collection to be in the hands of someone friendly to the Church, who would consider giving it to the Church at some future date. I also told David Sorensen that if he wanted to acquire the collection, he would be acting on his own, without warranties, financing, or representations of any sort by the Church. I further advised him that he had to take the steps necessary to verify that the collection existed, that it was worth the asking price, and that it was not encumbered by some security interest in a third party. I also told him that if he acquired it, it would be entirely up to him whether he would later donate it to the Church or resell it. There was no discussion of access to the collection or publicity of the acquisition, those matters being entirely up to the purchaser.

As you know, David Sorensen engaged an attorney to handle the acquisition. When Hofmann could not meet the attorney's requirements for verification, the anticipated acquisition was cancelled, and Sorensen's check for the \$185,000 purchase price was never delivered to Hofmann.

What of the allegations of Joseph Smith's involvement in folk magic?

Hofmann's forged documents and some of the critical commentary on their significance have the apparent purpose of persuading members and nonmembers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that the Church is based on superstition instead of divine revelation.

It should be recognized that such tools as the Urim and Thummim, the Liahona, seerstones, and other articles have been used appropriately in biblical, Book of Mormon, and modern times by those who have the gift and authority to obtain revelation from God in connection with their use. At the same time, scriptural accounts and personal experience show that unauthorized though perhaps well-meaning persons have made inappropriate use of tangible objects while seeking or claiming to receive spiritual guidance. Those who define folk magic to include any use of tangible objects to aid in obtaining spiritual guidance confound the real with the counterfeit. They mislead themselves and their readers.

In his own history, Joseph Smith related his employment by Josiah Stowel [also spelled *Stoal*] to search for treasure. Joseph wrote:

“He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony, Susquehanna county, state of Pennsylvania; and had, previous to my hiring to him, been digging, in order, if possible, to discover the mine. After I went to live with him, he took me, with the rest of his hands, to dig for the silver mine, at which I continued to work for nearly a month, without success in our undertaking, and finally I prevailed with the old gentleman to cease digging after it. Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money-digger.” (*History of the Church*, 1:17.)

Treasure-seeking was a cultural phenomenon of that day. It was indulged in by upright and religious men such as Josiah Stowel. Young Joseph Smith accepted employment with Stowel at fourteen dollars a month, in part because of the crushing poverty of the Smith family. Joseph and his older brothers had to scour the countryside for work in order to construct their home and make the annual payment on the farm, which they were in imminent danger of losing and finally lost for nonpayment shortly after this period.

Some sources close to Joseph Smith claim that in his youth, during his spiritual immaturity prior to his being entrusted with the Book of Mormon plates, he sometimes used a stone in seeking for treasure. Whether this is so or not, we need to remember that no prophet is free from human frailties, especially before he is called to devote his life to the Lord's work. Line upon line, young Joseph Smith expanded his faith and understanding and his spiritual gifts matured until he stood with power and stature as the Prophet of the Restoration.

## Conclusion

When all the wounds have scarred over and when tempers have cooled, will any good have come of the documents portion of this Mark Hofmann episode? I hope some lessons will have been learned by the members of the Church and by historians, archivists, investors, and media personnel. I hope we will all be less inclined to act and speak precipitously and more inclined to reserve judgment about the significance of so-called new historical discoveries.

I have appreciated the caution expressed by Church leaders during the succession of document discoveries, a caution not always followed by historians, investors, magazines, newspapers, and television reporters, Church and non-Church alike. President Gordon B. Hinckley repeatedly cautioned that the Church did not know whether these documents were authentic.

I tried to counsel that same caution in a talk I gave to a group of Church Educational System teachers on 16 August 1985. This was two months prior to the bombings that led to the detection of Hofmann's forgeries. I quote three paragraphs from that talk, which was titled "Reading Church History."

"Some recent news stories about developments in Church history rest on scientific assumptions or assertions, such as the authenticity of a letter. Whether experts or amateurs, most of us have a tendency to be quite dogmatic about so-called scientific facts. Since news writers are not immune from this tendency, news stories based on scientific assumptions should be read or viewed with some skepticism. ...

"The contents of most media stories are dictated not by what is necessary to a full understanding of the subject but by what information is currently available and can be communicated within the limitations of time and space.

"As a result, the news media are particularly susceptible to conveying erroneous information about facts, including historical developments that are based on what I have called scientific uncertainties. This susceptibility obviously applies to newly discovered documents whose

authenticity turns on an evaluation of handwriting, paper, ink, and so on. Readers should be skeptical about the authenticity of such documents, especially when there is uncertainty where they were found or who had custody of them for 150 years. Newly found historically important documents can be extremely valuable, so there is a powerful incentive for those who own them to advocate and support their authenticity. The recent spectacular fraud involving the so-called Hitler diaries reminds us of this, and should convince us to be cautious.”

Later in this 16 August 1985 address, I observed that “historical and biographical facts can only contribute to understanding when they are communicated in context.” This is the work of the scholar. We would all be better informed about history if historical impressions came from the articles and books of mature and objective scholars rather than through the often sensational and always incomplete “stories” of journalists.

Sound historical work takes time, but patience is rewarded. I am pleased to note that the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at Brigham Young University is about to publish three volumes of extraordinary importance to LDS Church history. Edited by Dean C. Jessee, these volumes will contain all of the known diaries and autobiographical writings of Joseph Smith in their earliest versions. Those published for the first time will include all of the “diary” portions of the early manuscript known as The Book of the Law of the Lord. Also included will be the little-known draft of Joseph Smith’s history mentioned in the Church’s 16 October 1986 statement that denied Church possession of an Oliver Cowdery history. This important manuscript, which Professor Richard Anderson believes was recorded by the Prophet’s clerk, James Mulholland, appears to be an early draft of many pages of volume 1 of the Documentary History of the Church.

And so we are, hopefully, at the end of this tragic episode. After exhaustive investigations by law enforcement authorities and a host of media investigators, the charges against the Church and its leaders have been shown for what they are. Vicious lies have been exposed. Innuendos of Church or Church-leader involvement in the crimes of Mark Hofmann have been demonstrated to be groundless. In fact, Hofmann has admitted that his documentary crimes were at least partly motivated by his desire to change the history of the Church in which he no longer had faith. Everyone who believed and repeated his lies and used his forged documents was at best an unwitting servant of his efforts to discredit the Church. This description refers to Hofmann’s crimes against reputation. In his crimes against person and property, he had many victims, the Church being only one among many.

When it comes to naivete in the face of malevolence, there is blame enough to go around. We all need to be more cautious. In terms of our long-run interests in Church history, we now have the basis, and I hope we have the will, to clear away the Hofmann residue of lies and innuendo. With that done, we should all pursue our search for truth with the tools of honest and objective scholarship and sincere and respectful religious faith, in the mixture dictated by the personal choice each of us is privileged to make in this blessed and free land.

