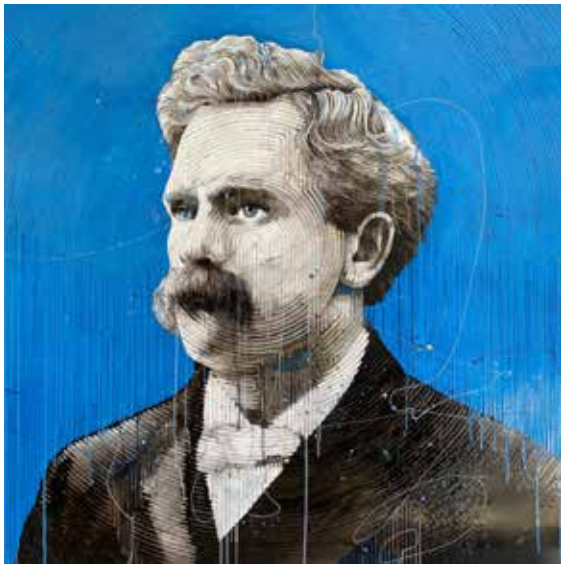


LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN NAZI GERMANY

A Summary of New Archival
Findings



B. H. Roberts Foundation

bhroberts.org

Salt Lake City, Utah
2025

Sicherheitsdienst des RFH

SD-Hauptamt

Mormonen

Cover page of the *Sicherheitsdienst* dossier on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (R 58/5686, Bd. 14, 1936–1939). *Bundesarchiv*, Berlin, Germany. (Image from *Bundesarchiv*, Berlin.)

INTRODUCTION

In November 2024, researchers at the B. H. Roberts Foundation accessed a previously unpublished 500+ page Nazi surveillance file on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Hitler's Germany. The dossier, housed in Berlin's Federal Archive (*Bundesarchiv*), documents systematic Nazi monitoring of Church members and missionaries from 1933 to 1938.

Created by the *Sicherheitsdienst*—the Nazi Party's intelligence agency—the collection includes surveillance reports, arrest records, correspondence between Church mission leaders and Nazi authorities, confiscated tracts, police memoranda, and high-level assessments prepared for senior officials.

This report offers a contextualized summary of these new materials. English translations of select documents, along with other primary sources and a Q&A article on Latter-day Saints in Nazi Germany, have been made available by the B. H. Roberts Foundation.



The Federal Archive (*Bundesarchiv*) building in Berlin-Lichterfelde, which houses the file (R 58/5686 Bd. 14) concerning The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the early years of the Third Reich. (Image from Wikimedia.)

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS OF *BUNDESARCHIV* DOSSIER

Ongoing Surveillance:

The Gestapo kept the Church under observation, concerned about its foreign ties and perceived ideological differences.

(e.g. Memorandum, September 8, 1933, R 58/5686, Bd. 14, NS-Archiv des MfS/ZB I 1123, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany)

Warnings Issued:

Church leaders were cautioned that any perceived involvement in anti-state activities would result in severe police action.

(e.g. Memorandum, May 5, 1936, R 58/5686, Bd. 14, NS-Archiv des MfS/ZB I 1123, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany)

Missionary Activities Scrutinized: Missionaries were monitored, and their proselytizing efforts were viewed with suspicion, leading to discussions about potential bans.

(e.g. Report, September 8, 1937, R 58/5686, Bd. 14, NS-Archiv des MfS/ZB I 1123, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany)

Literature Confiscated:

Church publications, including James E. Talmage's *Articles of Faith*, were banned or seized for containing content deemed incompatible with Nazi ideology.

(e.g. Memorandum, July 4, 1936, R 58/5686, Bd. 14, NS-Archiv des MfS/ZB I 1123, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany)

Arrests and Interrogations:

Members faced arrest for acts such as refusing the Nazi salute, illustrating the personal risks faced by Church members.

(e.g. Report, June 5, 1936, R 58/5686, Bd. 14, NS-Archiv des MfS/ZB I 1123, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany)

Internal Reports:

Nazi officials produced detailed reports on the Church's structure and teachings, often misrepresenting its doctrines and labeling it as a threat to the state.

(e.g. Report, May 5, 1938, R 58/5686, Bd. 14, NS-Archiv des MfS/ZB I 1123, Bundesarchiv, Berlin, Germany)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

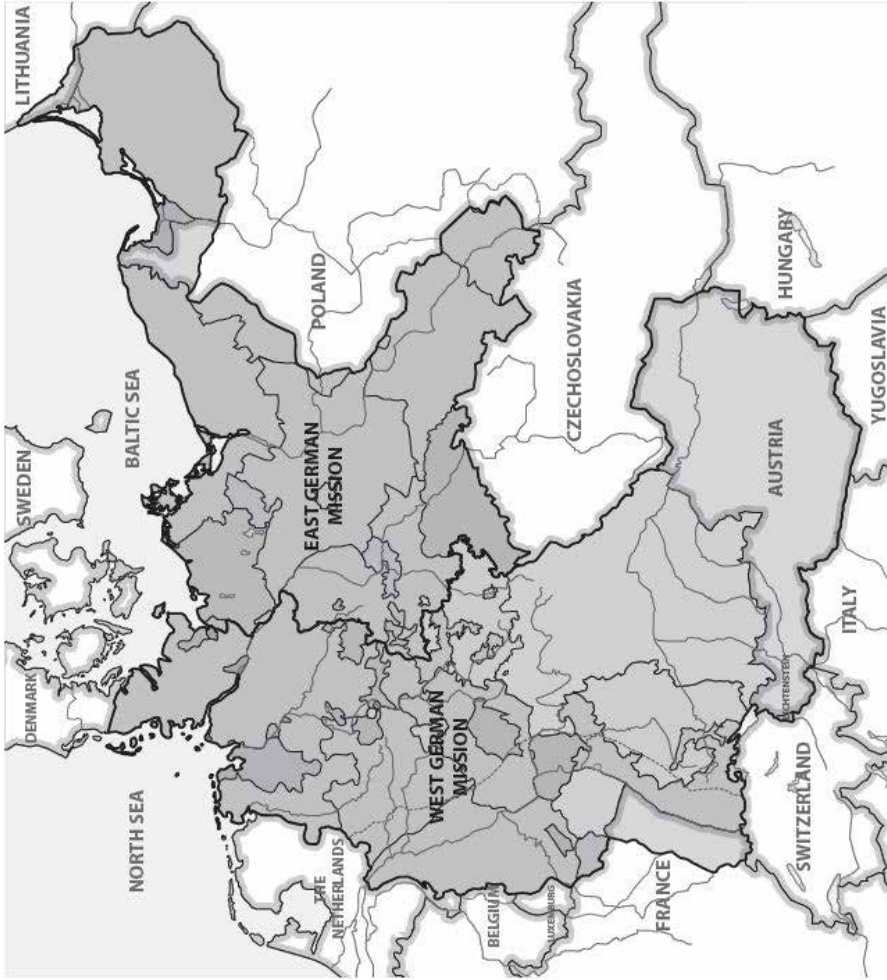
When Adolf Hitler became chancellor in January 1933, there were approximately 8,000 Latter-day Saints living in Germany and Austria. By the outbreak of World War II in 1939, that number had grown to more than 13,000 members, organized into 26 districts and 146 branches. (See Figure 1.)

At the time, the Church was officially classified as a *Sekte* (“sect”), a designation that carried legal but marginal standing and frequently connoted the pejorative implication of being a “cult” in German society.

The Nazi regime regarded religion, and Christianity in particular, with deep ambivalence. While certain churches were tolerated for pragmatic reasons, the regime ultimately viewed Christianity as a competing source of authority and loyalty. Religion was to be reshaped, subordinated, or sidelined to serve the goals of the regime.

"Disinterested in politics, but tremendously interested in life and life's happiness, the missionaries and members of the Church [in Germany] ceaselessly carry their message of cheer and hope to everyone who is willing in the least measure to listen."

—Improvement Era, October 1936



1939	East	West
Elders	402	390
Priests	194	179
Teachers	243	161
Deacons	445	345
Other Adult Males	1,245	939
Adult Females	4,336	3,172
Male Children	384	329
Female Children	358	280
<i>Total</i>	7,607	5,795

Mission	East (Berlin)	West (Frankfurt)	Total
Districts	13	13	26
Branches	75	71	146

Figure 1.

Church missions and membership in Germany and Austria in 1939 (from Roger Minert, *Under the Gun: West German and Austrian Latter-day Saints in World War II* [RSC/BYU, 2011], pp. 2, 4).

NAZI SURVEILLANCE AND SUSPICION

The *Sicherheitsdienst* dossier on Mormons documents the surveillance of Latter-day Saints across multiple German cities between 1933 and 1938.

Initial Surveillance Orders (1933-1934):

Nazi surveillance began within months of Hitler's rise to power. On October 4, 1933, the secret police recorded continued observation of the Church in Darmstadt, followed by similar directives for Berlin (October 11, 1933) and Karlsruhe (January 8, 1934). A September 8, 1933 Gestapo memorandum describes formal surveillance of the Church throughout Germany.

Active Monitoring (1935-1937):

By 1935, surveillance had intensified to include meeting infiltration and detailed reporting on Church activities. The *Sicherheitsdienst* filed reports on surveillance of a Church meeting in Berlin (July 4, 1935), activities in Erfurt (February 11, 1936), and a Church conference in Bremen (September 8, 1936).



Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler (seated, center), chief of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) and leading member of the Nazi Party. With him is Reinhard Heydrich (standing, left), chief of the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD). Berlin, Germany, 1938. (Image from United States Holocaust Museum.)



Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933 (seen here greeting supporters from a window of the Reich Chancellery that evening). At the time, there were approximately 8,000 Latter-day Saints living in Germany. (Image from the Documentation Center Nazi Party Rally Grounds of Nuremberg.)

NAZI SURVEILLANCE AND SUSPICION (CONT.)

In the collection, the August 18, 1937, Gestapo report on President Heber J. Grant's visit demonstrates the extent of the monitoring, with authorities tracking his sermons in Frankfurt and Berlin.

The active monitoring period saw the first direct warnings to Church leadership. On May 5 and May 22, 1936, Nazi authorities warned Church leaders that any perceived anti-state propaganda would result in the "strictest state police measures" against them.

*"The views of the Mormons . . . do not fit our
time or our National Socialist Germany."*

—Gestapo Report on Heber J. Grant's
Visit to Germany, 1937

MISSIONARY-FOCUSED SURVEILLANCE

The Gestapo viewed American elders with suspicion, concerned about foreign influence and ideological nonconformity. Surveillance reports from the *Sicherheitsdienst* dossier documented missionary activities between 1933 and 1938.

Housing became a specific concern for Nazi officials. According to a memorandum from 1937, several missionaries lived in apartments owned by Jews and some Church properties, including mission headquarters, were rented from Jewish landlords.

Arrest records in the dossier confirm the accounts from other sources that several missionaries were arrested or detained for alleged violations of Nazi regulations, such as handing out tracts.

"[Latter-day Saint] missionaries mostly live in rented rooms owned by Jews."

—SS Report, 1937



Heber J. Grant speaking in Frankfurt, Germany, July 8, 1937. To accommodate the large crowd in attendance (estimated to be between 800 and 1000 people), Grant spoke in an education center owned by the National Socialist Teachers League. The venue displayed a swastika flag—the *Reichsflagge* or *Hakenkreuzflagge*—the national flag of Germany at the time. (Image from Church History Library, Salt Lake City.)



President Roy Anson Welker (November 9, 1878–November 28, 1973; center, seated) and missionaries in the German-Austrian Mission, July 21, 1935. (Image from Church History Biographical Database.)

THE NAZI VIEW OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

Within the *Sicherheitsdienst* dossier, high-level reports sent to Nazi leaders painted the Church as ideologically incompatible with the goals of the Nazi state.

Some Nazi concerns expressed in the collection included the Church's ties to the United States; its emphasis on the Old Testament and Hebrew terms like "Zion" and "Sabbath"; Church leaders' perceived pacifism; the Church's positive interactions with Jews and Jewish property owners; and suspicions that it secretly practiced polygamy and other subversive practices and beliefs.

A September 11, 1937, report specifically voiced suspicions of "Jewish influence," while another report noted that "[Latter-day Saint] missionaries mostly live in rented rooms owned by Jews."

The most comprehensive assessment, prepared for *Reichsleiter* Alfred Rosenberg in 1938, concluded that "there can be no talk of a pro-German attitude" among Church leaders.

*"The doctrine of the Mormons is incompatible with
the National Socialist worldview."*

—Report to *Reichsleiter* Alfred Rosenberg, 1938

THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE THIRD REICH

Faced with escalating Nazi surveillance and threats, Church leaders adopted a strategy of political neutrality and careful compliance. Actions, as documented in mission correspondence and Nazi surveillance reports in the dossier, included:

- **Statements of Political Neutrality:**

Mission leaders issued letters instructing missionaries to avoid political discussions.

- **Direct Communication:**

Leaders sent explanatory letters to Nazi officials, including Oliver H. Budge (September 8, 1933) and Roy E. Babbel (June 28, 1935), clarifying Church policies and doctrine.

- **Doctrinal Justification:**

Mission President Roy A. Welker cited Article of Faith 12—belief in “obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law”—as justification for compliance with government authority (June 13, 1935).

"It is not our province at all to talk politics . . . and we can assist this government best by refraining from all political discussion or participation."

—Circular Letter of Roy A. Welker,
President of the German-Austrian Mission, 1936

II 1134 - 10241

VII.

Berlin 17 AUG 1938

An den

L. Jodel

Beauftragten des Führers
für die gesamte weltweite und weltanschauliche
Politik der NSDAP.
Herrn Reichsleiter Rosenberg

Berlin W. 35

Margaretenstr. 17

Betr.: Sekte der "Mormonen".

Vorg.: Post-Schreiben III./Vj. 1444 vom 5.5.38.

Anlg.: 1 Bericht.

Sehr geehrter Herr Reichsleiter!

Anliegend überreiche ich Ihnen zur persönlichen Unter-
richtung einen ausführlichen Bericht über die Sekte der
"Mormonen".

Der Bericht weist eindeutig die internationale Hin-
stellung dieser jüdisch-christlichen Sekte, deren Lehre
in diesem Gegensatz zur nationalsozialistischen Weltan-
schauung steht.

Die Behauptungen seitens der Leitung der Deutschen
Gemeinden, die Sekte verbreite in Auslande, insbesondere
in Amerika, die Interessen des deutschen Volkes, ent-
sprechen nicht den Tatsachen. Es ist bekannt, dass gerade
von seiten der amerikanischen Leitung dieser Sekte gegen
das nationalsozialistische Deutschland gehetzt wird.

Von den amerikanischen Missionaren in Reich - es sind
derer im Reich z.Bt. etwa 160 - wird ferner eine Verbe-
tätigung durchgeführt, die schon wiederholt grosse Unruhe
und Beunruhigung unter der Bevölkerung hervorgerufen hat. Es
müsstens bereits mehrere amerikanische Missionare von den
zuständigen Ortspolizeibehörden ausgewiesen werden.

- 2 -



Cover page of a report prepared in 1938 for high-ranking Nazi official Alfred Rosenberg (pictured right). The report offered a detailed—though distorted—account of the Church’s history, organization, and teachings. Its final assessment concluded that “the doctrine of the Mormons is incompatible with the National Socialist worldview.” (Images from *Bundesarchiv*, Berlin; Wikimedia.)

CENSORSHIP AND BANNED BOOKS

In Nazi Germany, religious publications were subject to strict censorship—especially those deemed politically or ideologically threatening.

Among the works targeted was James E. Talmage's *The Articles of Faith*. According to a memorandum in the *Sicherheitsdienst* dossier, the Reich Literature Chamber—under the control of Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda—officially blacklisted the book in 1936. It was added to a "List of Harmful and Undesirable Literature," effectively banning its publication and distribution. The reason for the ban was not explicitly stated.

Earlier confiscations had already begun, according to the collection. A December 16, 1933, Gestapo report documented unnamed Latter-day Saints publications confiscated for "anti-state tendencies."

"In the city of Elbing, the Articles of Faith by Dr. James E. Talmage was banned and a threat of imprisonment was made to anyone who might try to distribute the book in the city."

-German-Austrian Mission Manuscript History,
Entry for July 11, 1936

CALLS FOR OFFICIAL CHURCH BAN

Despite Church efforts, Gestapo surveillance culminated in formal prohibition recommendations. On January 19, 1937, police in Schwerin recommended banning the Church on ideological grounds, while a September 8, 1937, document proposed a general ban on Latter-day Saint missionaries.

The May 5, 1938, report prepared for *Reichsleiter* Alfred Rosenberg represented the most comprehensive Nazi assessment, concluding that “the doctrine of the Mormons is incompatible with the National Socialist worldview.”

Despite these recommendations, the Church was never officially banned. A report from April 1937 indicates that “a potential dissolution [of the Church] was being considered” among Nazi officials, but it was halted due to the Church’s “international connections.”

*“It should be considered whether this sect . . .
might be subject to prohibition on ideological
grounds.”*

—Schwerin Police Memorandum, 1937

II 1 B 1 - S

Berlin, den 4. Juli 1936

1.) Auszug aus den Informationen des Geheimen Staatspolizeiamts
1116
Nr. 3 v. 3. Juli 1936.
Presse. (Ausland) .
pp.

Der Präsident der Reichsschrifttumskammer hat die von der Schweizerisch-deutschen und der Deutsch-Österreichischen Mission der Kirche Jesu Christi der Heiligen der letzten Tage in Basel herausgegebene Druckschrift die "Glaubensartikel" von James E. Talmage auf die Liste des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums gesetzt.
pp.

2.) Zda. "Mormonen".

Ans!

K.



DIE GLAUBENSARTIKEL

EINE REIHE VON VORLESUNGEN ÜBER
DIE HAUPTLEHREN

DER KIRCHE JESU CHRISTI DER HEILIGEN
DER LETZTEN TAGE

VON

DR. JAMES E. TALMAGE
Ehem. der zwölf Apostel der Kirche

AUF ANORDNUNG DER KIRCHE AUSGEBEREITET UND VON IHR HERAUSGEGEBEN

Nach der achten Englischen Auflage
(20—43. Tausend)

Ins Deutsche überetzt
von dem Ältesten MAX ZIMMER und GEORGIUS Y. CANNON

Herausgegeben
von der Schweizerisch-Deutschen Mission
Basel, Rheinländerstr. 19
1919

Memorandum dated July 4, 1936, notifying the ban of James E. Talmage's *The Articles of Faith* (*Die Glaubensartikel*) in Nazi Germany. The order was issued by the president of the Reich Literature Chamber. (Images from *Bundesarchiv*, Berlin; Google Books.)



Latter-day Saints of the Frankfurt District choir in 1936 (image from Minert, *Under the Gun* [RSC/BYU, 2011]).

FAITHFUL RESISTANCE

While Church leaders urged members to pursue peaceful coexistence with the Nazi regime, some Saints chose to resist.

The most well-known example is Helmuth Hübener, a teenage member from Hamburg who distributed anti-Nazi flyers—a defiant act that led to his arrest, imprisonment, and eventual execution.

A new defiant Latter-day Saint was discovered in the dossier. It contains a 1936 arrest report for Paul Herbert Schieck, a Latter-day Saint from Freiberg, who refused to give the Nazi salute or sing Nazi anthems during a company meeting, citing his religious convictions. Though Schieck was eventually released, his arrest record notes that he lost his factory job as a result of his principled stand.

*"It contradicts my personal beliefs to serve both
Zion and another Reich. . . . I feel that as a
German I am subject to the Führer but consider
Zion to be the highest ideal."*

—Paul Herbert Schieck, Arrest Report, 1936

Sie Briefe
des Reichsgerichtes Berlin

Bestenfalls: II 3 B(Dr.X/H)
III 265/36 E.

Berlin, den 5. Juni 1936. 1142

Geheim

Am

den Politischen Polizeikommandeur für das
Land Sachsen.

zu Händen des H. Hauptfeldw. *W.*
- der Sachverhalt ist dem.

B e r l i n - 36. 11.

Betrifft: Kirche "Jesus Christus, der Heiligen der letzten
Tage" (Mormonen).

Zur Beurteilung der Einstellung der Kirche "Jesus
Christus, der Heiligen der letzten Tage" (Mormonen) am Staat
und Volk berichtet ich über folgenden Vorgang:

Anlässlich des Gesehnachtsfestes der Führer-
rede am 27. 3. 1936 hat der Vorsitzende

3 o h i e o K. Paul Herbert,
geb. am 8. 5. 1906 in Freiberg,
schon seit in Freiberg, Kommando Nr. 2,

am Schluss der Übertragung die Hand zum deutschen Gruß nicht
erhoben und auch das Deutschland- und Horst-Wessel-Lied nicht
mit Gesungen. Der Beschuldigte Schieck hat dem vernehmenden
Polizeibeamten gegenüber angegeben:

Als für den 27. 3. 36, 16 Uhr, für den gesamten Betrieb
des Gesehnachtsfestes angekündigt war, habe ich mich
schonfalls in den dazu vorgesehenen Saal begeben. Nach
der Führerrede erhob sich die gesamte Gefolgschaft und
singing das Deutschland- und Horst-Wessel-Lied an unter
Erhebung der rechten Hand. Ich habe hierbei weder einen
Aussagen noch habe ich die rechte Hand erhoben. Als Begrün-
dung hierzu habe ich angegeben, dass ich nicht in der Lage
sei, die Hand zu erheben, da ich an der Hand eine Verletzung
habe. Da ich der letzten Tage (Mormonen). Dadurch trete
ich ein für das Aufrechten eines Reiches Zion. Es wider-
spricht somit meiner persönlichen Auffassung, neben Zion
noch einen anderen Salome zu dienen. Die Mitglieder der
Kirche haben sich nicht an der Handerhebung beteiligt und
sind aus dem Saal gegangen. Ein Teil von ihnen, die sich
nicht an der Handerhebung beteiligten, soll ein Reich von
Mormonen errichten. Der Beschuldigte Schieck hat dem vernehmenden
Polizeibeamten gegenüber angegeben:

III B1-S 74/36

- 2 -

1143
Herrn. Ich fühle mich dennoch als Deutscher, bis dem
Nationalsozialismus, betriebe nur Zion als das höchste
Ideal. Ich finde in dem Nationalsozialismus und im deutschen
Gruß nur einen Widerspruch zu den Bitten eines Mannes
der einen jüdischen Staat zu errichten beabsichtigt.
Ich über mein gewisses Verhalten nicht abgeben.

V. Herbert Schieck.

Schieck ist auf Grund seines Verhaltens von seiner
Firma entlassen, aber wenig Zeit danach anderwärts wieder
eingestellt worden.

Die staatliche Staatsanwaltschaft hat das Verfab-
ren gegen Schieck auf Grund des Strafrechtsartikels von 23.
4. 1936 eingestellt.

Im Auftrage:

W.

Arrest report of Paul Herbert Schieck, dated June 5, 1936. Schieck, a Latter-day Saint
from Freiberg, was arrested for refusing to give the Nazi salute and sing Nazi anthems
during a workplace meeting. Although he was released shortly afterward, he lost his
job at the factory. (Images from Bundesarchiv, Berlin.)

CONCLUSION

The newly discovered *Sicherheitsdienst* dossier provides documentation of how Nazi authorities monitored and assessed a minority religious community.

The documents reveal an escalating pattern: from initial observation orders in 1933 to active meeting infiltration by 1935, culminating in formal ban proposals by 1937. Despite Nazi conclusions that the Church was ideologically incompatible with the National Socialist worldview, the Church was never officially banned.

These archival findings offer new insights into Nazi surveillance methods, the Church's survival strategies, and the individual experiences of Latter-day Saints under the regime.

To access documents from the dossier and read the appended Q&A exploring the Church's experience in Nazi Germany, visit bhroberts.org or scan the QR code.



Mormon Gestapo Archive
B. H. Roberts Foundation



About the B. H. Roberts Foundation

The B. H. Roberts Foundation (BHR) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to open-access research and education on Mormonism. BHR works on a variety of projects, including maintaining a database of primary source records and secondary scholarship on controversial church issues, funding research grants with the Mormon History Association, conducting sociological surveys, and publishing the mormonr.org website.