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# “To Keep the Church Record and History”: The Evolution of the Church Historian’s Office

Cory L. Nimer

## ABSTRACT

Authors looking at the development of the field of Mormon history have often evaluated it in terms of historiography—as its progression from the domain of amateurs to the output of academics. However, studies of the composition and development of the larger history profession have focused on the discipline’s fragmentation and the formation of an “archival divide” between those that write history and those collecting and preserving its sources. This latter approach provides a useful framework for understanding the evolution of the Church Historian’s Office of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from its origins in 1831 to its current home in the Church History Library. In exploring this theme, this paper will discuss the movement toward professionalization in the Church Historian’s Office from its founding until the 1980s.

## Introduction

As historians have examined the development of the Church Historian’s Office of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, they have oftentimes sought to assess it primarily based on its historiography. This approach, as embodied in such works as Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton’s *Mormons and their Historians* and Ronald Walker, David Whittaker, and James Allen’s *Mormon History*, describes a progression from the efforts of early Church chroniclers and compilers to a modern era in which academically trained Mormon historians use “their professional training to understand their heritage.”<sup>1</sup> However, when this viewpoint is applied to those called to serve as Church Historians, particularly those in the nineteenth century, focusing on the writing of history only addresses a portion of the work they undertook as they have sought to fulfill their scriptural charge “to keep the Church record and history.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Ronald W. Walker, David J. Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001): 60.
2. Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 47:3.

Assessing the development of the Church Historian's Office is also complicated by the emergence of archival science as a distinct profession. As noted by Robin Scott Jensen, the practices used to manage the Church's records has evolved over time and has generally followed developments in the wider profession.<sup>3</sup> In the late 1800s, it was common for historical societies to focus not only on history writing but the gathering of historical sources as well, with their administrators and staff participating in historical organizations such as the American Historical Association (AHA). The AHA's own Robert Townsend, in his book *History's Babel*, describes the breadth of the community that supported that organization's founding in 1884—embracing both academic teaching faculty and historical society staff.<sup>4</sup> But as the historical community grew and progressed, it fragmented into different groups with independent professional identities. One of the first of these groups was archivists, who left the AHA in 1936 to form the Society of American Archivists.<sup>5</sup> By the 1970s, this separation had hardened into what has been called the “archival divide,” with archivists and historians increasingly alienated from one another despite their common heritage.<sup>6</sup>

This resulting divergence in professional training and objectives has at times led to a lack of mutual understanding between the professions. Terry Cook in his article “The Archive(s) Is A Foreign County,” notes that issues surrounding appraisal and archival administration have affected the greatest change in the relationship between historians and archivists.<sup>7</sup> By the 1970s, archivists had begun to push back against their traditional characterization as the “handmaidens of history.”<sup>8</sup> In his presidential address to the Society of American Archivists in 1975, F. Gerald Ham suggested that archivists needed to become “more than a weathervane moved by the changing winds of historiography,” separating themselves from historians by taking a more active role in documenting society.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, archivists' partnership with records

3. Robin Scott Jensen, “The Rhetorical Power of Archival Access,” *Journal of Mormon History* 46, no. 4 (October 2020): 92.
4. Robert Townsend, *History's Babel: Scholarship, Professionalization, and the Historical Enterprise in the United States* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013): 29-30.
5. See William F. Birdsall, “The Two Sides of the Desk: The Archivist and the Historian, 1909-1935,” *American Archivist* 38, no. 2 (1975): 159-173.
6. Francis X. Blouin, Jr. and William G. Rosenberg, *Processing the Past: Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 7.
7. Terry Cook, “The Archive(s) Is a Foreign Country: Historians, Archivists, and the Changing Archival Landscape,” *American Archivist* 74 (Fall/Winter 2011): 606.
8. Jessica M. Lapp, “‘Handmaidens of History’: Speculating on the Feminization of Archival Work,” *Archival Science* 19 (2019): 216.
9. F. Gerald Ham, “The Archival Edge,” *American Archivist* 38, no. 1 (1975): 8.

management and information science led them to expand their focus beyond the needs of historians.<sup>10</sup>

In the Church Historian's Office, this division between history and archives developed slowly as the office moved to professionalize its functions beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In doing so, those appointed as Church Historians moved away from their dual role as both historical writers and keepers of historical sources, deemphasizing publication to become instead librarians and archivists. Due to the advocacy of academically trained historians in the 1960s, the office was reorganized as the Historical Department in 1972. However, conflicts over historical writing ultimately led to a reaffirmation of the department's archival function, and the 1981 transfer of the History Division to Brigham Young University (BYU, sponsored by the Church).

## Establishment and Early Development

The position of Church Historian was established by revelation at the time the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded with the charge that "there shall be a record kept among you."<sup>11</sup> To fulfill this calling, early Church Historians such as Oliver Cowdery (1830-1831) and John Whitmer (1831-1835) documented the growth of the Church through the production of narrative histories.<sup>12</sup> Whitmer's text, the Book of John Whitmer, was written based on its author's own experiences of events in the early years of the Church, as well as inserted copies of early Church documents.<sup>13</sup>

After Whitmer was excommunicated in 1838, taking his history with him, Church founder Joseph Smith reinitiated his effort to record the story of the Church with the assistance of clerks such as James Mulholland (1839), Robert B. Thompson (1840-1841), and W.W. Phelps (1841-1842).<sup>14</sup> In December 1842, Willard Richards took up the project at the Church's new headquarters in Nauvoo, Illinois as Smith's secretary and

10. Richard J. Cox, "Archivists and Historians: A View from the United States," *Archivaria* 19 (Winter 1984-1985): 186.
11. Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 21:1.
12. Karen Lynn Davidson, Richard L. Jensen, and David J. Whittaker, eds. *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Histories, 1831-1847* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church Historian's Press, 2012): 9.
13. *Ibid.*, 10. According to Davidson, Jensen, and Whittaker, in addition to his writing, Whitmer was heavily involved in recordkeeping and gathering documentation. Ronald E. Romig notes his assignments as a scribe, clerk, and missionary provided him access to records as well, though these also reduced the time available for him to act as historian. The narrative history that he produced was likely not begun until 1835, but documents events between 1831 and 1844. See Ronald E. Romig, *Eighth Witness: The Biography of John Whitmer* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Books, 2014): 122-123, 144, 508.
14. Dean Jessee, "The Writing of Joseph Smith's History," *BYU Studies* 11, no. 4 (Summer 1971): 464-466.

Church Historian.<sup>15</sup> The process of preparing this work, which has become known as *The History of Joseph Smith* or the “Manuscript History of the Church,” is often described as one of compilation. Materials were taken from a variety of sources, arranged in chronological order, and brought together in a single text using narrative transitions. As clerk Howard Coray described it, “the Prophet was to furnish all the materials; and our business was not only to combine and arrange in chronological order, but to spread out or amplify, not a little, in as good historical style as may be.”<sup>16</sup>

After the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, Richards continued his work on the history, depending perhaps more heavily on available documentation. A year later as he neared completion of the entries for 1843, Richards put out a call to members of the Church to submit “books, maps, charts, papers, documents, of every kind name and nature” relating to the Church for inclusion in the history, and to “be filed away for future use.”<sup>17</sup> When the Church moved west in 1846, Richards oversaw the transport of the history and other records first to Winter Quarters then on to Utah with Brigham Young’s company.<sup>18</sup> After arriving in Utah, however, Richards quickly became overwhelmed with other responsibilities and died before he was able to return to the project.<sup>19</sup>

George A. Smith was appointed as Richards’ successor in April 1854 and carried on with the history in the same manner. Smith had worked with Richards on the project in Nauvoo and was familiar with the compilation and writing process.<sup>20</sup> In 1855, he constructed an office where he and his staff could work, located behind his home on South Temple Street in Salt Lake City.<sup>21</sup> Smith also solicited additional documentation, traveling east to consult with John Taylor and sending out inquiries to others familiar with the events being described to include in the history. The final account, a mixture of narrative history and compiled documents, was completed in 1857 by Assistant Church Historian Wilford Woodruff, with the entire text reviewed and approved by Brigham Young.<sup>22</sup>

15. Ibid., 454.

16. Howard Coray, “Autobiography,” MS 8142, Church History Library.

17. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Historian’s Office History of the Church,” November 16, 1845, CR 100 102, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/d22a7e06-d310-4534-81e0-4a19a9f31b59/0/331>.

18. Davis Bitton and Leonard Arrington, *The Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 1988): 12-13.

19. Charles P. Adams and Gustive O. Larson, “A Study of the LDS Church Historian’s Office, 1830-1900,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 376.

20. Bitton and Arrington, *The Mormons and Their Historians*, 19-20.

21. Adams and Larson, “A Study of the LDS Church Historian’s Office, 1830-1900,” 378.

22. Gary Bergera, “‘The Commencement of Great Things’: The Origins, Scope, and Achievement of the Journal History of the Church,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 24.

With the completion of Joseph Smith's history, the Historian's Office began work to prepare a similar history of Brigham Young. Documenting both Young's activities and the history of the Church from the time of his birth, the compilation of the "Manuscript History" up to 1877 eventually ran to 48 volumes. As described by historian Leonard Arrington, "the volumes are good historical accounts up to about the year 1858, after which they are more of a scrapbook of information."<sup>23</sup> Work on these volumes continued past the end of George A. Smith's term as Church Historian, through that of Albert Carrington, and was eventually completed under Orson Pratt in 1881.<sup>24</sup>

As the Historian's Office staff neared completion of this history, the newly chosen president of the Church, John Taylor, appointed a committee to review the work being undertaken. The resulting report called for increased professionalism by the staff, as well as care for the materials under their stewardship. As the committee described it,

"No person seems to have an adequate idea of what the office contains. ... There seems to be a great lack of system and classification. There are no catalogues and no proper registry kept of books borrowed, loaned and returned. ... There is no safe or vault of any kind that can be used for the safe keeping of important documents and records, the present building being not only wholly insufficient as to capacity but entirely insecure against burglary, incendiary or other casualty. The floors are strewn with boxes, books and papers for which there seems to be no other place. The Historian, clerks, tables, cupboards and library are all in one compartment and everything is cluttered and inconvenient."<sup>25</sup>

In order to rectify the situation, they recommended a number of changes be made, including the appointment of a staff member to serve as librarian, the construction of a new building, and that the history being compiled be managed as a scrapbook rather than a copied manuscript. After the report was issued, Taylor also closed the office to most researchers, noting that "the Historian's Office was not a public office" and should only be accessible to those with permission from the office of the Trustee in Trust.<sup>26</sup>

23. Leonard Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998): 66.

24. Bergera, "The Commencement of Great Things," 24. See also Robin Scott Jensen, "Archives of A Better World': The Nineteenth-Century Historian's Office and Mormonism's Archival Flexibility," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, 2019), 222-237.

25. Joseph F. Smith, Francis M. Lyman, and John Henry Smith, Committee Report on the Historian's Office, September 1881, CR 1 495, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/3f9d1fie-c335-4d3a-9e40-b9adcb18d2fd/o/o>.

26. Church Historian's Office, Historian's Office Journal, March 31, 1882, Church History Library. The entry noted that previous public access to the records had resulted in losses, as well as the use of Church records by those deemed "enemies."

## Institutionalization of Recordkeeping Practices

During the 1880s under Wilford Woodruff (1883-1889) and Franklin D. Richards (1889-1899), work continued to compile the history of the Church. Prior to his appointment as assistant historian in 1883, Richards had proposed an exhaustive list of topics to be included in the history, including information on administrative changes, construction projects, and statistics on emigration and tithing, as well as other regional and national events that affected the Church.<sup>27</sup> However, again progress appears to have been slow until Richards' appointment of newspaper editor Charles W. Penrose as his assistant historian in 1895. Over the next four years, until he left the Historian's Office in 1899, Penrose sought to create a daily record of the activities of the Church. He also sought to expand the range of sources included in the scrapbooks, working with the First Presidency to acquire more information about policy and administrative decision-making.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps based on the recommendations from the earlier committee, work also progressed during this period on organizing the collections held by the Historian's Office. Following common practice in libraries and manuscript repositories at the time, the original documents were merged and rearranged regardless of provenance and placed chronologically in subject files.<sup>29</sup> While not all documents in the office's care were integrated into these files, a significant portion of the collection was processed in this fashion to simplify access for researchers.<sup>30</sup>

A final area of work undertaken by Woodruff and Richards during this period was gathering additional information for the office, on both major events in Mormon history and on the experience of the members in individual congregations throughout the Church. In 1887, they enlisted Andrew Jenson, a Danish convert with previous experience in researching and publishing on Mormon history.<sup>31</sup> Jenson believed himself to have been "born a natural historian," and was deeply invested in sharing the history of the Restoration with others.<sup>32</sup> Beginning around 1879, he had begun publishing *Morgenstjernen*, a Danish-language "historical magazine" that

27. Bergera, "The Commencement of Great Things," 26-27.

28. *Ibid.*, 28.

29. Ronald K. Esplin, "Modern Efforts to Preserve Church History," in *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints*, Richard E. Turley, Jr. and Steven C. Harper, eds. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2010): 190. For information on contemporary manuscripts processing, see Richard C. Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: A Historical Analysis* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1983): 11-13.

30. Esplin, "Modern Efforts to Preserve Church History," 190.

31. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 16.

32. Andrew Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson: Assistant Historian of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, 1938): 445.

included historical articles and excerpts from primary sources.<sup>33</sup> This dedication to the use and promulgation of historical sources aligned him with both developing concepts of scientific history, as well as with projects being undertaken by historical societies that published such sources both to provide greater access and to ensure their preservation.<sup>34</sup>

Jenson's initial assignments under Church Historian Franklin D. Richards focused on collecting information from Church members and other informants using a variety of methods. As he later recounted it in his autobiography, Jenson conducted a series of historical travels on behalf of the Church beginning in 1888, during which he gathered information, reviewed local records, interviewed members, and copied personal journals. Among the areas he visited were early Mormon historical sites (1888, 1893); settlements in Utah and Idaho (1889-1894) as well as in Arizona, Mexico, and Canada (1894); and foreign missions worldwide (1895-1897).<sup>35</sup> Through these visits, he was able to gather or transcribe important documents, obtaining fragments of the *Book of Mormon* manuscript and a copy of John Whitmer's history, as well as collecting original records from local congregations that were then placed in the Historian's Office.<sup>36</sup> He also met with older settlers, reviewing and taking notes from personal journals and interview accounts in order to expand the office's documentation of the history of Mormon communities and local ecclesiastical units.<sup>37</sup>

In the course of these record-gathering expeditions, Jenson was able to closely review the state of recordkeeping in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and recommend changes as needed. As early as 1892, Jenson was forwarding his observations to the First Presidency, reporting:

"In most places I have found the Church records in a very deplorable, neglected condition; in many instances no regular records are being kept at all, and those few which are kept are as a rule kept without any system or order. Nearly all the early records kept in the several [local congregations] have long ago been lost, misplaced or destroyed entirely, and consequently about half the members of the Church are in perfect ignorance today as regards the date of their blessings, baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, etc., as most of them have relied on the public records that are lost."<sup>38</sup>

33. Bitton and Arrington, *The Mormons and Their Historians*, 44-45.

34. *Ibid.*, 388, 542. For information on historical societies' role in publishing sources, see Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies: 1790-1860* (Madison, WI: Cantwell Printing, 1944): 3-21.

35. Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson*, 387-388.

36. *Ibid.*, 622; Bitton and Arrington, *The Mormons and Their Historians*, 46.

37. Reid L. Nielson, "Enlarging the History of Mormonism: Historian Andrew Jenson's Tales from the World Tour, 1895-97," in *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints*, Richard E. Turley, Jr. and Steven C. Harper, eds. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2010): 168-169.

38. Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson*, 200.

Similar letters were prepared for Richards as he completed his tour of settlements in the West in 1894, and again following his tour of the Church's foreign missions in 1897. In order to improve the quality of the records that would eventually come to the Historian's Office, Jenson spoke to the units he visited on the importance of recordkeeping, providing suggestions to clerks and others on how and what to record, and even taking the initiative to develop new standardized forms for local use.<sup>39</sup>

In response to these calls for reform, on December 14, 1899, the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles appointed a Committee on Church Records to explore means for improving recordkeeping practices.<sup>40</sup> The group, which included apostles Francis M. Lyman and Rudger Clawson, as well as Jenson in his role as Assistant Church Historian, made its recommendations in March. These included the introduction of four new standardized records: "a church membership form, ordinations to the priesthood, and a form for the names of children blessed," and "an imported form for recommends both to the temple and for removals."<sup>41</sup> It also suggested instilling a sense of accountability in local clerks with the establishment of a "Record Day" where the presidencies of stakes (administrative units similar to a Catholic diocese) could review the records of local congregations annually, though this was not adopted by the Church leadership until 1901.<sup>42</sup>

As the holdings of the Historian's Office grew, Jenson became increasingly concerned about the building in which they were stored. Although the 1881 report had recommended that new office space be constructed, the office remained in the space George A. Smith had built in 1855 "for the 'history business.'"<sup>43</sup> Taking the initiative once more in 1898, Jenson proposed to the First Presidency that he transfer the copyright to his earlier book *Church Chronology* to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and that future sales of the volume be used to provide the necessary funding to finance the construction of a new "fire-proof" building.<sup>44</sup> The proposal was accepted; a letter was produced by President Lorenzo Snow encouraging members to purchase the volume, and Jenson threw himself into promoting and selling the reprinted text.<sup>45</sup>

39. *Ibid.*, 227, 388. See also Harold H. Jenson, "Gathering Church History," *Deseret News*, March 9, 1918.

40. Rudger Clawson, *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1993): 123.

41. *Ibid.*, 140.

42. Anthon H. Lund, *Danish Apostle: The Diaries of Anthon H. Lund, 1890-1921* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2006): 108.

43. Adams and Larson, "A Study of the LDS Church Historian's Office, 1830-1900," 376-378.

44. Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson*, 391.

45. *Ibid.*, 394; Keith W. Perkins, "A Study of the Contributions of Andrew Jenson to the Writing and Preservation of LDS Church History," (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971): 56.

Within a couple of years, however, it appears that the Church leadership realized that Jenson's plan was not a viable solution to the building problem. By 1900, the First Presidency had received numerous complaints from leaders of congregations about Jenson's "egotistical" approach to advertising, leading them to install fellow Dane Anthon H. Lund as the new Church Historian to try to resolve the discord and rein in Jenson.<sup>46</sup> Lund worked with President Snow to remodel portions of the office's home, replacing the roof with an iron roof, connecting the office to the house and removing the stove, and adding an iron door to protect the library.<sup>47</sup> While these modifications improved the safety of the building considerably, they did not address the space issues. It would not be until the completion of the Church Administration Building in 1917 that the Historian's Office would be able to move into larger facilities.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the space limitations, and in the face of personal disappointments following the transfer of the *Chronology* copyright, Jenson continued to make important contributions in aggregating and organizing historical materials during this period. In 1906, Jenson was assigned to manage the scrapbooking work previously supervised by Charles W. Penrose.<sup>49</sup> He introduced his own innovations to the project, though. Rather than using bound volumes, Jenson would affix the selected material to legal size sheets which were aggregated and arranged chronologically in looseleaf binders. The individual entries he selected included a wide range of materials, from diary entries and meeting minutes, to public speeches and newspaper accounts.<sup>50</sup> Jenson also developed a card index to the collection, improving access to the material and creating a virtual subject file similar to that already used for managing manuscript material in the office.<sup>51</sup> The resulting volumes, which came to be known as the Journal History, recorded a daily history of the Church using compiled materials from its establishment in 1830. In doing the work, Jenson retrospectively covered the 19th century and his assistant, Joseph Fielding Smith, covering the 20th century.<sup>52</sup> This historical compilation was not produced with an expectation of publication but as a reference source, an aggregation of sources from which narrative reports or histories could be prepared.<sup>53</sup>

46. Lund, *Danish Apostle*, 88.

47. *Ibid.*, 91; Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson*, 401.

48. Jenson, 523.

49. Bergera, "The Commencement of Great Things," 28.

50. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 16.

51. Bitton and Arrington, *The Mormons and Their Historians*, 50.

52. Bergera, 28.

53. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Conference Report, October 1917," 85-87. Narrative histories were prepared from these manuscript sources by Historian's Office staff, though these were infrequently published. An example of one of these published histories is Jenson's *History of the Scandinavian Mission* (Salt Lake City, UT: Arno Press, 1927).

Another major project initiated by Jenson was the aggregation of local unit records, as well as collecting information on their leaders. While visiting local congregations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1880s and 1890s, he had produced voluminous notes while also gathering original records. When visiting foreign missions, he expanded this effort, boxing up “nearly two thousand valuable records” and having them shipped to the Historian’s Office.<sup>54</sup> These records, he felt, would “constitute the foundation and outline for histories of nearly every stake, ward, branch, quorum, association, etc. of the Church, in its gathered state, and of every mission, conference, branch, etc., abroad from the organization of the Church to the present time.”<sup>55</sup> At President Lund’s request, Jenson, after his return, began to organize his notes for review and use. Following the same approach used for the Journal History, the materials for each stake and mission were aggregated in expandable binders to form “manuscript histories,” allowing the staff to quickly add new materials as they were gathered in subsequent visits.<sup>56</sup> Along with these organizational materials, Jenson, as a private enterprise, also solicited information about the local Church leaders and prominent individuals, sending out letters to bishops, stake presidents, bishop’s counselors, and older members to request biographic sketches and genealogical materials. These were eventually brought together as his *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, published in four volumes between 1901 and 1936.<sup>57</sup>

Through the work undertaken by Jenson and his associates in the Historian’s Office at the turn of the 20th century, the aggregation of Church records and manuscripts was expanded and formalized based on principles similar to those used in historical societies and libraries elsewhere in the country at the time. Based on the procedures established during this period, the primary work of the office continued with little modification for the next fifty years. Yet during the same period, new ideas were being introduced to the American historical community that would lead to the gradual transformation of the office and its staff. In 1909, the Conference of Archivists of the American Historical Association first met, with papers given that introduced

54. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Conference Report, October 1917,” 512.

55. *Ibid.*, 388.

56. Bitton and Arrington, *The Mormons and Their Historians*, 46; Jenson, *Autobiography of Andrew Jenson*, 445-446. In order to facilitate the maintenance of the manuscript histories, recordkeeping instructions for ward clerks were changed in 1906 to require minute books to be written as historical narratives describing events in the unit. In 1925, this procedure was again adjusted with the introduction of a quarterly historical report that was submitted by the clerks. These were then added to the Historian’s Office manuscript histories, essentially becoming the history of the unit. In addition to this record, ward clerks also managed church membership records and meeting minutes. See “Speech Given by Earl Olson to the Andrew Jenson Club,” February 15, 1974, Leonard Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3, Utah State University; *Annual Instructions: to Presidents of Stakes and Counselors, Bishops and Counselors, Stake Clerks and General Authorities in Zion* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1906); *Handbook of Instructions for Bishops and Counselors, Stake and Ward Clerks* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1928).

57. Perkins, “A Study of the Contributions of Andrew Jenson,” 67.

European archival concepts such as *respect des fonds* and original order.<sup>58</sup> It is unclear how aware the Historian's Office was of these changes in manuscript and archival management during this early period.<sup>59</sup> Instead, the office aligned itself more closely with the library community than archives or history as it sought to carry out the 1881 committee's recommendations.

In 1904, Joseph Fielding Smith, son of Church president Joseph F. Smith, was placed in the role of librarian, where he worked to expand the Historian's Office book collection of early Mormon imprints as well as cataloging and indexing materials.<sup>60</sup> During his tenure in this role, another committee appointed by the Church leadership to review the office reported on its improved circumstances, stating:

“Upon careful inspection, [they] found that the original letters, documents, manuscripts and books of the Church now in possession of the General Church Historian are in a good state of preservation...and have been filed and catalogued and made easy of access...carefully filed away in modern files.”

Nevertheless, some issues remained to be solved, as the report also mentioned the need to institute stronger security and controls over records that they held.<sup>62</sup> As librarian, Smith also monitored the use of the records under his care, restricting some materials in order to prevent any improper use.<sup>63</sup>

The custodians who followed Smith in the role of librarian sought to maintain the same standards for management and use of Church-owned manuscripts. On January 18, 1909, care of the library was passed to A. William Lund, son of Church Historian Anthon H. Lund. During his tenure as librarian, Lund was primarily

58. Waldo Gifford Leland, “The First Conference of Archivists, December 1909: The Beginnings of a Profession,” *American Archivist* 13, no. 2 (April 1950): 113-114.

59. Although apostle Reed Smoot was involved in efforts to create a national archive for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there are no entries in the Journal History related to archival practice before 1933. The first archival reference in the Journal History is dated January 2, 1933 (page 8). For mention of Smoot and the archives, see Peter Wosh, ed. *Waldo Gifford Leland and the Origins of the American Archival Profession* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2011): 34.

60. Journal History, January 23, 1904: 9-11; Leonard Arrington, “Joseph Fielding Smith: Faithful Historian,” *Dialogue* 7 (Spring 1972): 22. While changes were made in the organization and management of records in the office after 1881, the position of librarian was not created until 1904 (see “Guide to the Historian's Office Library-Archives,” 1966, Church History Library).

61. John Henry Smith, Heber J. Grant, and Rudger Clawson to Joseph F. Smith, May 19, 1908, First Presidency Administrative Files, 1878-1918, CR 1 169, Church History Library, <https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/record/2bd59799-5511-4cfe-9373-2aef83b9b6e1/318dda80-36f9-473b-bc90-f03221688b6d?view=browse>. This may have been due to the work of Jenson organizing the Journal History and unit histories, as suggested by Adams and Larson, though some credit undoubtedly belongs to the appointed librarians.

62. *Ibid.*, 389.

63. Earl Olson, “The Office of the Church Historian, 1933-1986,” Church History Library.

responsible for providing reference service to the collection, learning both the facts and the sources.<sup>64</sup> He also served as a gatekeeper, approving projects for researchers before they could use the materials.<sup>65</sup> After the death of President Lund in 1921, Joseph Fielding Smith was appointed as Church Historian, implicitly reinforcing his earlier positions in limiting access to the collections.<sup>66</sup> Then when Lund was out moved of the library in 1928 to work with the Journal History, Smith appointed his brother Alvin F. Smith to take on the role. As librarian, Alvin Smith was also a cautious gatekeeper over the records until his death in 1948, showing “no sympathy with anyone who tried to belittle or discredit the Church.”<sup>67</sup>

## Introduction of Professional Archival Practice

Under Joseph Fielding Smith, the Historian’s Office focused on building and protecting their collections. As Leonard Arrington would later describe it, “his principal interest as Church Historian was archival—that is, in acquiring materials and preserving them.”<sup>68</sup> However, while the staff was focused on preservation, it is unclear the extent to which they were aware of early developments in the field of archives. Beginning in the early 1930s, it seems to have been the Genealogical Society of Utah whose interest in archives spurred the Historian’s Office toward increased standardization and centralization of recordkeeping. The Journal History includes a series of entries starting in 1934 documenting the usefulness of archives for tracing family histories, including a published report by Archibald F. Bennett on his visits to the Library of Congress, state archives and historical societies, and the site of the national archives building being constructed in Washington, D.C.<sup>69</sup> Around the same time, the Genealogical Society began a project in conjunction with the Historian’s Office to compile vital records information held in local congregations throughout

64. Richard E. Turley, Jr., “Assistant Church Historians and the Publishing of Church History,” in *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints*, Richard E. Turley, Jr. and Steven C. Harper, eds. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2010): 31.

65. Olson, “The Office of the Church Historian.” Access to portions of the Church Historian’s Office records had been opened as early as 1918, with permission of the librarian. See Jenson, “Gathering Church History.”

66. Arrington, “Joseph Fielding Smith,” 22.

67. Olson, “The Office of the Church Historian.” Historian Leonard Arrington recounted a number of anecdotes that he collected about Alvin F. Smith in his diaries, particularly noting his open hostility to researchers using the Church Historian’s Office collections to study Mormon splinter groups. See Leonard J. Arrington diary, Sept. 20, 1972 (Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 10 box 30 folder 2, Utah State University) and April 19, 1978 (box 33 folder 3).

68. Leonard Arrington, “The Founding of the LDS Church Historical Department, 1972,” *Journal of Mormon History* 18 (Fall 1992): 42.

69. Journal History, November 24, 1934; Church History Library.

the Church.<sup>70</sup> This program was intended to improve access to these records, but did not intend to gather these materials into the office at that point.<sup>71</sup>

With the increased genealogical research in the membership records, in 1949 Joseph Fielding Smith issued a letter to stakes and missions asking that records remaining in the hands of local units be forwarded to the Historian's Office. Among the items requested were older records of members that might be held in the local units, as well as unit minute books, priesthood quorum minute books, and auxiliary organization minute books. The letter also included reminders about the filing of quarterly reports, patriarchal blessing books, and printed materials, and an offer to accept private journals.<sup>72</sup> Once the membership materials were received, the staff of the Genealogical Society began to microfilm these records for preservation and wider distribution, completing the project in 1952.<sup>73</sup>

The continuing centralization of recordkeeping in the Church led in turn to the further development of the Historian's Office library, as well as increased stress on the office's facilities. With the death of Alvin Smith, the position of librarian passed to Earl E. Olson, the grandson of Andrew Jenson and a longtime employee.<sup>74</sup> Olson, who had also worked in the Archives Department of the Genealogical Society, found a sizeable backlog upon taking up the office, reporting that the library staff "were greatly behind on their work. Books were stacked all over the floor; some minute books had been processed but many others were not. There was much to do in the library to get it organized and to process materials."<sup>75</sup>

In order to catch up, Olson arranged for several additional employees to be taken on to assist in the library, bringing the total to six. Steps were also taken to address the increasing lack of storage space available to the Historian's Office. Headquartered originally on the third floor of the Church Administration Building, the office had run out of shelving space by 1951 and were forced to seek permission to install shelves in the basement. The following year, the staff began further expansion by adding "double-deck" shelving starting in the southeast corner of the basement, and in 1953, the third floor was reorganized to narrow the aisles and maximize shelf space.<sup>76</sup>

70. Journal History, August 11, 1934; Church History Library.

71. The following year the Historian's Office began indexing the records in their holdings, such as the index list known as the Margetts File. See Olson, "The Office of the Church Historian," 4.

72. Journal History, May 2, 1949; Church History Library.

73. Olson, "The Office of the Church Historian," 6.

74. Ibid., 5. For a brief biography of Olson, see Turley, "Assistant Church Historians and the Publishing of Church History," 35.

75. Turley, "Assistant Church Historians," 35.

76. Ibid., 6-8.

With little space available for future expansion within their current facilities, plans for a new building began to be considered. In November 1952, President David O. McKay approved planning for a new Church Archives Building, which would include space for the Historian's Office, the Genealogical Society, and the Church Membership Department.<sup>77</sup> Preparations for this building, which was to be constructed on the northeast corner of North Temple and Main Street, continued throughout the decade, and the design of the building shifted over time. Preliminary discussions in 1954 envisioned an office building with 15 vault floors, eight office floors, and a reading room located at the top.<sup>78</sup> In 1960, Olson, accompanied by the architects and Harold Jacobson of the Genealogical Society, toured archival facilities across the United States and Canada, including the Huntington Library in California. Following these visits, however, the Genealogical Society decided to back out of the planning process in order to construct their own facilities, and the project was cancelled.<sup>79</sup>

While the archives building project of the 1950s and 1960s was ultimately unsuccessful, the excitement surrounding that planning effort initiated the next phase of development of the Historian's Office, encouraging greater engagement with national trends of archival management and more cooperation with the emerging archival community in Utah. Within the state, the Utah State Historical Society and Brigham Young University had taken an early leadership role for archival development. In May 1947, the Historical Society appointed one of its Board of Trustees members, William Palmer of Cedar City, to serve as the State Archivist.<sup>80</sup> Palmer, an amateur historian who had earlier worked for the Historian's Office, spent the next few years establishing a microfilming program and developing subject files on Utah communities.<sup>81</sup> By 1953, Palmer and Utah Secretary of State Lamont Toronto had convinced the Historical Society's Board of the need for such a program, and the following year funding was approved to hire an archives professional. The Historical Society selected Everett L. Cooley, a recent Ph.D. graduate from the University of California, Berkeley with archives experience, to institute a program to control public

77. Ibid., 7.

78. "Historian's Office Report for 1955-1960," 1; Olson, "The Office of the Church Historian," 8.

79. "Historian's Office Report for 1955-1960," 1. The public notice of the project's cancellation was made on March 23, 1962. See "Historian's Office Report for 1961-1965," 6.

80. Utah State Historical Society Board of Trustees minutes, June 12, 1947, Division of State History Administration Files, Series 3192, Utah Department of Administrative Services Division of State Archives & Records Service.

81. Cory L. Nimer and J. Gordon Daines III, "The Development and Professionalization of the Utah State Archives, 1897-1968," *Journal of Western Archives* 3, no. 3 (2012): 16-17, <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/westernarchives/vol3/iss1/5/>; Olson, "The Office of the Church Historian," 4. Both the microfilming and "gleaning" programs instituted by Palmer might be seen as analogous to the Journal History and microfilming projects undertaken by the Historian's Office.

records in State of Utah.<sup>82</sup> At nearly the same time, President Ernest L. Wilkinson at BYU decided to install S. Lyman Tyler from its history faculty as university librarian. Tyler had an expansive vision of the role of university library, with plans to “acquire and organize for use a collection of books and other library material to meet the requirements of the teaching and research program of the University, the Alumni, and the Church Membership in general.”<sup>83</sup> In addition to joining library organizations, Tyler also joined the Society of American Archivists in 1954 and by 1956, had been designated as historian and archivist for the Unified Church School System.<sup>84</sup>

It was through the influence of these institutions, as well as a push for expanded membership in the region by the Society of American Archivists (SAA), that the Historian’s Office was ultimately able to join the archival community. In 1956, Everett Cooley invited SAA to hold its annual meeting in Salt Lake City, arranging for the event to be hosted jointly by the State’s Historical Society, the Genealogical Society of Utah, and the Sons of Utah Pioneers.<sup>85</sup> By 1957, Cooley had made overtures to the Historian’s Office to join in hosting the conference, speaking with Earl Olson about serving on the local arrangements committee.<sup>86</sup> At Olson’s suggestion, Cooley wrote to Joseph Fielding Smith to encourage him to allow Olson to join SAA and contribute to the conference planning.<sup>87</sup> Smith agreed and Olson was able to attend the SAA’s 1957 conference in Columbus, Ohio that October—“the first time that anyone from [that] office [had] been permitted to participate in professional meetings of organizations that deal with history, archives or libraries.”<sup>88</sup> During the conference, Olson took detailed notes from the sessions he attended, while also taking advantage of the conference to visit leading libraries and archives in the area to learn more about their procedures.<sup>89</sup>

82. Nimer and Daines, “The Development and Professionalization of the Utah State Archives, 1897-1968,” 18-19.

83. “Two Year Report of the Brigham Young University Library, July 1956-June 1958,” 32-33, Harold B. Lee Library records, UA 549a, box 30, folder 5, Brigham Young University.

84. George E. Warren letter to S. Lyman Tyler, November 17, 1954, Harold B. Lee Library records, UA 549a, box 28, folder 4, Brigham Young University; “Statement of Policy for the University,” March 24, 1956, Harold B. Lee Library records, UA 614, box 38, folder 10, Brigham Young University.

85. Everett Cooley letter to S. Lyman Tyler, November 9, 1956, Harold B. Lee Library records, UA 614, box 42, folder 1, Brigham Young University.

86. Everett Cooley letter to Lyman Tyler, August 12, 1957, Harold B. Lee Library records, UA 614, box 42, folder 1, Brigham Young University.

87. *Ibid.*; Everett Cooley letter to Joseph Fielding Smith, August 12, 1957, Society of American Archivists files, 1957-1971, CR 100 9, Church History Library.

88. Olson, “The Office of the Church Historian,” 11.

89. “Historian’s Office journal,” October 7, 1957; Church History Library; Earl Olson, “Report of visit to the American Archivists Convention at Columbus, Ohio,” Society of American Archivists files, 1957-1971, CR 100 9, Church History Library.

The affiliation of the Historian's Office with the larger archives community quickly led to changes in the office's operations. In the area of archives, within a month of Olson's return from the 1957 SAA conference, the staff had completed a project to rehouse journals and other manuscripts in boxes and folders.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, after the Society of American Archivists' meeting in Salt Lake the following year in 1958, the office took initial steps to initiate a records management program for the Church.<sup>91</sup> During this period, the Historian's Office staff also began to affiliate with organizations for library professionals, with similar effect. In 1959, Olson and another staff member were invited to participate on a committee of the Utah Library Association to develop a new classification system for Mormon publications. Using a system developed at Brigham Young University two years earlier, the committee finalized the classification scheme that same year, and it was adopted by the Historian's Office in early 1960.<sup>92</sup> While this decision led to significant work reclassifying their print collections, it brought the library into conformance with professional standards.<sup>93</sup>

The growing work of the library staff under Olson paved the way for further expansions. In March 1959, the library portion of the Historian's Office was reorganized as the Library-Archives, and divided into four functional units with separate section heads.<sup>94</sup> The organizational structure would evolve over the coming decade as the staff continued to develop, extending to include three more divisions and reaching 42 employees by 1970.<sup>95</sup> In hiring new employees, Olson increasingly turned to professionals or individuals with experience working in archives, while some longtime members of the staff were sent to national training institutes

90. Olson, "The Office of the Church Historian," 11.

91. *Ibid.*, 12-13.

92. S. Lyman Tyler memorandum to Earl C. Crockett, December 15, 1959, Harold B. Lee Library records, UA 614, box 38, folder 3, Brigham Young University; "Report of the Historian's Office Library-Archives for the Year 1960," 5, Church History Library.

93. By 1965, the office was involved in the Society of American Archivists, the American Library Association, the Special Libraries Association, the National Microfilming Association, the American Records Management Association, and the Utah Library Association. It was noted that participating in these groups provided instruction on current procedures within the profession, as well as improving the image of the Church library-archive in the wider community. See "Report of the Office of the Church Historian, Including the Historian's Office Library-Archives, for the Five-Year Period 1961-1965, and Inventory of Holdings as of December 31, 1965," 7, Church History Library.

94. "Report of the Historian's Office Library-Archives for the Year 1960," 1, Church History Library. The sections originally included the Library Section, Manuscripts Section, Public Service Section, and Written Records Section.

95. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian, including the Historian's Office Library-Archives, for the Five Year Period 1966-1970, and an Inventory of Holdings as of December 31, 1970," 2-3, Church History Library.

administered by the National Archives.<sup>96</sup> At the same time, there were slight reductions in staffing for the History Division, which was already overburdened with the maintenance of the Journal History, the compilation of other historical data, and the preparation of the unit manuscript histories.<sup>97</sup> According to Assistant Church Historian Preston Nibley, due to these demands, the staff “never [did] any actual writing of history.”<sup>98</sup>

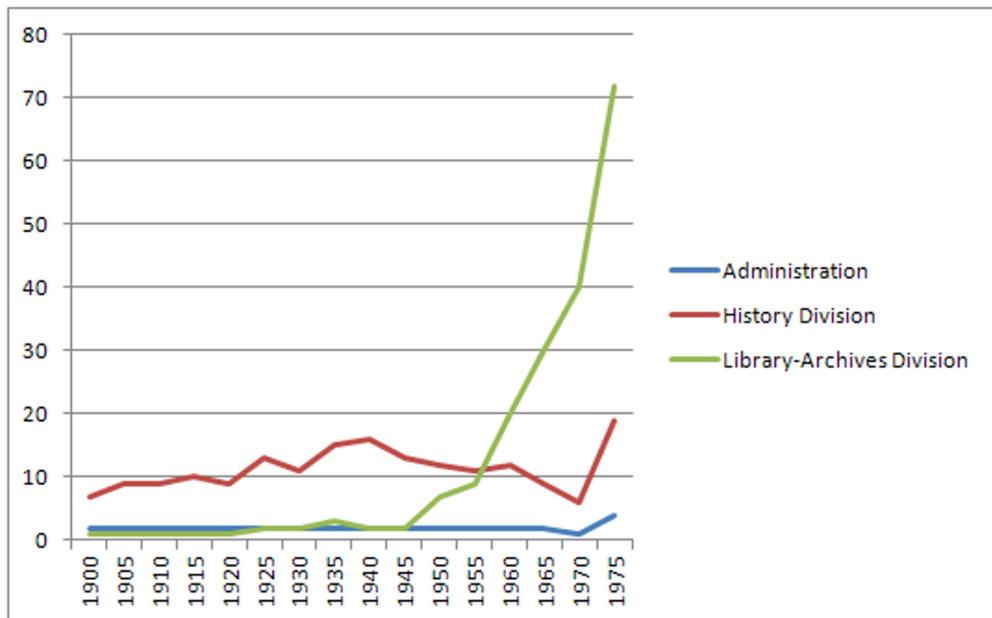


Figure 1. Staffing levels at the Historian’s Office, 1900-1975

96. Esplin, “Modern Efforts to Preserve Church History,” 190-191; “Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson,” 2, copy in possession of author. Early professionals hired by the department included Janet Jensen in the Library Section, and Dean Jessee and Jeffery Johnson in the Manuscripts Section. Jessee and Johnson both gained experience working with manuscripts in the Brigham Young University Library. Jensen studied at BYU and earned a library degree from Columbia University in 1966. See Janet Jensen, “Variations Between Copies of the First Edition of the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 2 (1973): 7-8; “Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1970,” 9.

97. Most of the effort appears to have been directed to the Journal History. According to Olson, since 1925 the manuscript histories had been composed primarily of the accumulated unit Quarterly Reports. See “Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1965,” 9, Church History Library.

98. “Historian’s Office Journal,” January 4, 1957, Church History Library.

During this early period of professionalization, the Library-Archives Division continued to make significant progress in both managing their materials, and in strengthening their position within the Church organization. An area of particular interest for Olson was the growth and development of their records management program.<sup>99</sup> In 1965, the program, which initially had only dealt with financial records, was expanded to all Church departments and a Records Management Committee was established under S. Lyman Tyler. A three-part program was formulated to address forms creation, records retention, and storage issues, and was placed under the direction of Olson as records manager.<sup>100</sup> In the five years after the establishment of the program, microfilming procedures had been developed, record schedules created, and about 5,200 boxes of inactive and semi-active records were deposited in an offsite Records Center in southwest Salt Lake City, representing an estimated \$108,212 savings to the Church.<sup>101</sup> The staff also began to change how permanent materials in the archives were handled. After some effort starting around 1960 to consolidate the office's name files, this approach was abandoned in 1966 and new procedures were implemented that assigned "a letter designation for major areas, and a numerical arrangement within each area," with photographs separated into other series.<sup>102</sup>

As the Church administration increasingly saw the Historian's Office as professionally staffed and operated, a push to share that expertise developed. In 1965, the First Presidency determined that the Historian's Office should establish a central reference library, which would serve as the hub for a Church-wide system of libraries.<sup>103</sup> By 1967, a plan for meetinghouse libraries and regional repositories was finalized; the following year, a Meetinghouse Library Committee was established to guide and support the program.<sup>104</sup> A Church Library Coordinating Committee was also formed in 1968, bringing together library professionals from the Brigham Young University and the Church Educational System, the Genealogical Society, and Historian's Office. Olson was appointed chairman of the committee, a decision that

99. Merrill Lofthouse letter to Earl E. Olson, March 19, 1984, Earl Olson scrapbook, MS 7414, Church History Library.

100. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1965," 12, Church History Library.

101. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1970," 12-13.

102. "Report of the Historian's Office Library-Archives for the Year 1960," 6; "Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1970," 10. However, there was still reluctance during this period to implementing methods, such as creating registers for collections (see also "Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson," 2).

103. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1965," 5.

104. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1970," 8; "Library Program Moving Rapidly Ahead," *Deseret News*, January 23, 1971, 4.

seemed to reject the early leadership of BYU in library development and reinforce the Historian's Office new position at the center of the Church library system.<sup>105</sup>

While significant improvements were made in the staffing and procedures of the Historian's Office during this period, changes in access policies for archival materials were slower to change. While the Archivist's Code, created by the National Archives in 1955, called for archivists "to promote access to records to the fullest extent consistent with the public interest," Joseph Fielding Smith considered the office to be a private repository and remained reluctant to expand access to materials throughout his administration.<sup>106</sup> Olson did take steps to codify and standardize the access procedures, producing a guide to the repository in 1966 that described the collections for researchers and explained handling and use.<sup>107</sup> He also developed a reputation for assisting scholars in locating needed materials and providing individualized reference service.<sup>108</sup> These steps contributed to a sense of greater openness and to a corresponding increase in patrons using the materials.<sup>109</sup>

As a result of the various initiatives undertaken by the Historian's Office during the 1960s, the transformation of the institution into a professionally-managed archival repository had already begun by the time Joseph Fielding Smith became president of the Church in 1970. With the appointment of Howard W. Hunter as Church Historian, it was expected that this course focusing on the office's archival functions would continue.<sup>110</sup> As he approached the new position, however, Hunter charted a different course.

105. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1970," 8-9; "The Church Moves On," *Improvement Era* 72, no. 3 (March 1969): 91.
106. National Archives and Records Administration, "The Archivist's Code," National Archives and Records Administration, <https://historyhub.history.gov/docs/DOC-1031>; "Office of the Church Historian," 10. Those wishing to use the collections were first interviewed by Smith, A. William Lund, or Alvin Smith, and their topics approved before access was provided. In later years, those that were given access were also required to submit their notes to Lund for review after completing their research. Undesirable items would be redacted before the notes were returned to the researcher. For some accounts of these access restrictions, see "Speech Given by Earl Olson to the Andrew Jenson Club"; Esplin, 192; Davis Bitton, "Ten Years in Camelot: A Personal Memoir," *Dialogue* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1983): 10-11; "Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson," 3.
107. "Guide to the Historian's Office Library-Archives," 1966, M258.42 G946 1966, Church History Library; Helen Bird, "Biographical Sketch of Earl E. Olson," 1984, MS 7370, Church History Library.
108. "Earl Olson vita," 1894, Leonard J. Arrington letter to Earl E. Olson, March 6, 1984, and James Allen letter to Earl E. Olson, March 23, 1984, Earl E. Olson Scrapbook, MS 7414, Church History Library.
109. "Report of the Office of the Church Historian,...1970," 12. The report showed a threefold increase in the number of scholars using the collections between 1965 and 1970.
110. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Writing of Latter-day Saints History: Problems, Accomplishments and Admonitions," *Dialogue* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1981): 124; Cory L. Nimer, "The Old Guard and Rearguard Actions: Professionalization and the Church Historian's Office," *Journal of Mormon History* 45, no. 1 (January 2019): 111.

## Professionalization and Separation of Historians and Archivists

Following his appointment, Hunter turned to the scriptures in order to better understand the office's requirements. From his studies he determined:

“There are definitely two sides of the Church Historian’s responsibility. One is as an archivist, to collect and preserve those things that will be of value in the future. ... The other responsibility is to build the living side of the history by recording the events of the times. Truthfully, the assignment as given by the Lord through revelation is tremendously challenging—both in fulfilling the task of collection and writing and in making the material of use to the members of the Church.”<sup>111</sup>

This latter task had been managed by the Historian’s Office staff for some time as a quasi-archival activity through projects such as the Journal History and the manuscript unit histories. However, as Hunter considered how to professionalize this function, he decided to turn to academically trained historians rather than archivists. During his time as a stake president in California, Hunter had become acquainted with the Huntington Library, and with historian Leonard Arrington.<sup>112</sup> In August 1970, he met with a group of Mormon historians to solicit ideas for how to modernize the Historian’s Office—a group which included Arrington, who recommended the appointment of a professional historian to establish a publications and research program in the library.<sup>113</sup> Hunter appeared to have embraced their proposals and in 1972, after the death of A. William Lund, the Historian’s Office was reorganized as the Historical Department.<sup>114</sup> The new organizational structure included separate divisions for a Church Archivist (Olson), a Church Historian (Arrington), and later a Church Librarian (Donald Schmidt, assistant university librarian at Brigham Young University, was later appointed).<sup>115</sup>

The restructuring of the old Historian’s Office reinvigorated the organization, setting the stage for further growth and professionalization. One of the most visible changes was the department’s move in 1972 from the Church Administration Building

111. Jay M. Todd, “Elder Howard W. Hunter, Church Historian,” *Era* (April 1970): 27.

112. “Oral History Interview with Max J. Evans,” 4, copy in possession of author; “Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson,” 7.

113. Arrington, “The Founding of the LDS Church Historical Department, 1972,” 45-46.

114. Gary Topping, *Leonard J. Arrington: A Historian’s Life* (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2008): 99-101.

115. “A Report of the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Consisting of the Administration, History Division, Library-Archives Division, Curator’s Division, Meetinghouse Library Division, and the Historic Arts & Sites Committee for the Five Year Period 1971-1975,” 8, M258 H673r 1971-1975, Church History Library. The Archives and Library Divisions were later combined into the Library-Archives Division under Schmidt. See “A Report of the Historical Department,...1971-1975,” 9.

to the Church Office Building, a project that Earl Olson had been involved in planning since 1964.<sup>116</sup> The new facilities included improved work areas for researchers and staff, and additional storage for the collections.<sup>117</sup> In the Archives Division, the staff, many of whom had archival experience or training, was expanded to handle the growing bulk of Church records.<sup>118</sup> These new professionals pushed for the adoption of national archival processing standards, resulting in the Historical Department's acceptance of the record group concept and a program for producing registers for the collections in 1973.<sup>119</sup> The acceptance of provenance-based organization eventually led to an expansion of the project in which the existing subject and name files were dismantled and organized into collections by their creator, including work to reconstitute the papers of Church presidents Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.<sup>120</sup> As with the library program, steps were also taken during this time to reinforce the Archives Division's position among Church archival repositories. In February 1973, a Church Archives Coordinating Committee was formed with representatives of Church schools, the Church Educational System, the Genealogical Society, and with Earl Olson as the chair.<sup>121</sup> In its first meeting, an agreement between the Historian's Office and the Church Educational System was distributed that delineated the collecting responsibilities of each repository and established the

116. "Biographical Sketch of Earl E. Olson," 2-3. Following the cancellation of a separate building for the Historian's Office in 1962, they were drawn into planning for the Church Office Building (see also: "Historian's Office Report for 1961-1965," 6).
117. "A Report of the Historical Department,...1971-1975," 8
118. Matthew K. Heiss, "Doing the Impossible: Documenting the Worldwide Church," in *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints*, ed. Richard E. Turley Jr. and Steven C. Harper (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010): 233-234; Ronald O. Barney, "A Generation of Church History: A Personal View," in *Preserving the History of the Latter-day Saints*, ed. Richard E. Turley Jr. and Steven C. Harper (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010): 219-220. Some staff members were also sent for training at the National Archives' institute, including Max Evans, Jeffery Johnson, Don Schmidt, and even Earl Olson. See "Oral History Interview with Max Evans," 6; "Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson," 4; Olson, "The Office of the Church Historian, 1933-1986," 33.
119. "Policy Decisions Journal," May 9, 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 5, Utah State University; "Oral History Interview with Ronald Watt," 5-6, CR 100 288, Church History Library; "Oral History Interview with John Sillitoe," 3, copy in possession of author; "Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson," 4.
120. Esplin, "Modern Efforts to Preserve Church History," 193-195, 203-204; "Oral History Interview with Max Evans," 6.
121. "Meeting of Archivists Minutes," July 16, 1973, Harold B. Lee Library records, UA 549a box 77b folder 3, Brigham Young University.

archives in Salt Lake as the central repository of the Church.<sup>122</sup> Meanwhile in the History Division, Leonard Arrington hired a talented group of academically-trained, professional historians to support an ambitious program of research and publication.<sup>123</sup> In short order, the division was producing an impressive number of articles and books that included both volumes of edited original documents and interpretive works.<sup>124</sup>

While the separation of the archives and history functions of the Historical Department assisted in their professionalization, it also emphasized the differences that had emerged between the two disciplines since the growth of the archives field in the 1930s—something that was particularly evident in areas where the Archives and History Divisions cooperated. One of these areas was acquisitions, where the archives had the primary responsibility for gathering and preserving the records the historians would later use to write the story.<sup>125</sup> The History Division, however, felt they had an interest in ensuring that the record created would meet their own historiographical needs, and included “assist[ing] with the acquisition of diaries and records” in their own division objectives.<sup>126</sup> While the Historian’s Office had a long history of procuring personal papers to supplement their other holdings, Arrington felt that this activity had been neglected as the department concentrated on

122. “An Archival Program for the Church Educational System,” February 15, 1973, University Archives Records, UA 1068 box 15 folder 3, Brigham Young University. This decision significantly modified previous arrangements. Under the terms of Tyler’s 1956 appointment as archivist for the Unified Church School System, the archives at Brigham Young University might have collected both the records of other Latter-day Saint schools (e.g., Church College of Hawaii or Ricks College) and its own records, such as the Brigham Young University Board of Trustees minutes.
123. Leonard J. Arrington, “Historian as Entrepreneur: A Personal Essay,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 2 (1977): 11-12; “Plan of Operations of the Church History Division,” April 10, 1972, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.10 box 30 folder 1), Utah State University; Bitton and Arrington, *The Mormons and Their Historians*, 137. Of the existing staff of the History Division, Thomas G. Truitt was transferred to the Archives Division while Flore Chappuis and Merrill Lofthouse were retained on an effectively temporary basis for ongoing projects until they retired and were replaced by professional staff. See “Historical Department meeting minutes,” January 20, 1972, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.10 box 29 folder 5, Utah State University; and “How the History Division Grew,” Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 14 folder 13.
124. For a complete list of works published by the History Division, see Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Doves and Serpents: The Activities of Leonard Arrington as Church Historian, 1972-1982* (Salt Lake City, UT, 1982): 244 (Appendix B pagged separately 1-41).
125. Alvin R. Dyer, “The Future of Church History,” *Ensign* (August 1972), accessed June 2022, <http://www.lds.org/ensign/1972/08/the-future-of-church-history?lang=eng>; “Goals and Objectives,” 1974, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 1 folder 8, Utah State University.
126. Programs of the Historical Department of the Church [History Division], August 8, 1972, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 15 folder 2, Utah State University. Trends in the history field away from institutional history in favor of social history fueled the need for collecting personal papers and similar materials.

corporate records.<sup>127</sup> As a result, over his first few years as Church Historian, Arrington advocated for an expansion of their manuscript collecting program, developing proposals to appoint representatives of the department at the regional and stake levels to “channel historical materials” to the Historical Department.<sup>128</sup> Similar differences were raised as the Archives Division implemented changes in local unit recordkeeping requirements, which first eliminated requirements for the direct collection and central storage of local minutes and later removed many of the specific guidelines for their creation.<sup>129</sup> While these changes were made largely on the basis of archival considerations, committees were formed within the department which eventually issued counter-recommendations in favor of preserving detailed minutes as part of the historical record.<sup>130</sup>

Another subject of mutual concern for the historians and archivists in the department was the maintenance of the Journal History, which at the time of the reorganization was assigned to the History Division. Although Arrington initially instructed a member of his staff to continue to create entries in the traditional

127. “Speech Given by Earl Olson at Andrew Jenson Club,” 18; Church History Division Minutes, February 5, 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 3, Utah State University. This was an early concern of Arrington’s and other historians. In a draft of his written recommendations to Howard W. Hunter in 1970, Arrington included the suggestion of employing a “traveling historian-librarian” to collect manuscript materials in the field. See Leonard J. Arrington letter to Howard W. Hunter, August 31, 1970, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 19 folder 10.
128. Historian’s Division minutes, May 18, 1972, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 2, Utah State University; Historian’s Division minutes, December 11, 1972, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 2, Utah State University; Ezra Taft Benson letter to stake presidents, January 7, 1974, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 19 folder 6, Utah State University.
129. The decision to eliminate the archives’ role with local minutes was precipitated by a repository-wide microfilming effort initiated in 1973 and that went into effect by 1974. See Earl Olson letter to Harold B. Lee, January 29, 1973, and Earl Olson memorandum to Joseph Anderson, March 7, 1973, Earl Olson scrapbook, MS 7414, Church History Library; Policy Decisions Journal, June 27, July 11, 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 5, Utah State University. After this time, minutes could be incorporated into the annual unit historical reports, and were retained locally.
130. Committee of Minutes and Historical Records memorandum to the Executive Committee of the Historical Department, March 28, 1977, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 15 folder 10, Utah State University; Leonard J. Arrington letter to G. Homer Durham, November 1, 1977, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 5 folder 6, Utah State University; Historical Department committee’s suggested revisions for the Secretary’s Guide, May 9, 1979, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 15 folder 8, Utah State University; Earl E. Olson memorandum to Ron Watt, May 16, 1979, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 14 folder 13, Utah State University. The committees submitted the final versions, these respective documents were published as *Church Historical Records: Instructions for Stake and Ward Clerks* (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1977) and *The Secretary’s Guide: Instructions for Priesthood and Auxiliary Secretaries* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980).

fashion, he was dissatisfied with the format of the Journal History.<sup>131</sup> Early in 1973, two cross-divisional committees were charged with reviewing the history's compilation process and making recommendations for how it might be improved. Their recommendations called for the expansion of the document to include extracts from the minutes of presiding quorums, and the end of clipping newspaper articles in favor of professional indexing of periodicals.<sup>132</sup> While the latter of these proposals was largely accepted, the former was rejected as impracticable due to access restrictions on the materials the historians desired to include.<sup>133</sup> Despite Arrington's reservations in continuing the Journal History in its current form, Olson felt that it should be maintained by a senior historian and the responsibility remained with the History Division.<sup>134</sup> Arrington would spend a portion of his time directing the compilation of the history for the next few years, with the assistance of his secretarial staff.<sup>135</sup>

While these differences between the archivists and historians could be seen within the department, concerns among the Church administration regarding the History Division's publishing program led them to consider the distinct roles of each profession as well. While the History Division had been established with the expectation that its historians would use professional, academic standards in the production of history, some members of the Church leadership felt that the books and articles being published according to those standards by the division's staff were not sufficiently faith-promoting.<sup>136</sup> As a result, on April 5, 1978, the First Presidency issued a letter to G. Homer Durham, Managing Director of the Historical Department, calling for a "shift in emphasis" for the History Division toward

131. Church History Division minutes, June 1, 1972, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 2, Utah State University; Leonard J. Arrington journal, July 10, 1972, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.10 box 30 folder 1). Arrington felt that the quality of the Journal History had deteriorated over time, consisting at that time primarily of newspaper clippings about the Church taken from local papers. See: "Thoughts for a Talk on the Historical Department of the Church," undated, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 15 folder 3, 7, Utah State University.
132. "Proposal for a Revival of the Journal History of the Church," February 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 15 folder 8, Utah State University; "Report of the Indexing Committee," 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 15 folder 10, Utah State University; "Proposal to Begin a Compilation Called 'Chronicles of Church History,'" March 12, 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 5 folder 6, Utah State University.
133. Bergera, "The Commencement of Great Things," 33.
134. Church History Division minutes, June 11, 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 3, Utah State University; Policy Decisions Journal, June 13, 1973, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 1 folder 5, Utah State University.
135. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 64-65.
136. Bitton, "Ten Years in Camelot," 16-17; Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 67-68. As these accounts point out, these problems were in part the product of internal conflicts between the History Division staff and individuals in the Library-Archives Division. See "Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson," 7.

“archival” tasks such as the maintenance of the Journal History and the gathering of historical sources.<sup>137</sup> Plans were made for the “refinement” of the history but by the end of 1979, the task of compiling the document had been taken over by staff from the Library-Archives Division.<sup>138</sup> The History Division instead spent the next few years working to complete unfinished research projects before they were eventually transferred to Brigham Young University to form the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History in 1981.<sup>139</sup>

## Conclusion

With the transfer and dissolution of the History Division, the Church acknowledged the “archival divide” that had emerged among the professionals in the Church Historical Department and established the department’s role as primarily archival. While early historians had written narratives based on their own experiences and available sources to document historical events, this process had changed by the 1880s to simply compiling those sources. Later, as the archival profession emerged from the field of history, the office transitioned from historical compilation to archival processing and management. By the 1980s, the Historical Department had become a professionally staffed archival repository that focused on collecting and preserving the records of the Church and its members.

The introduction of professional historians to the department in the 1970s highlighted the divergence between the professions over the course of the 20th Century. These distinctions can be seen in the internal disagreements over the acquisitions programs and the compilation of historical sources. In such cases, the historians’ focus on the research use of collections for the publications program was in tension with the archivists’ established role in documenting the institution and managing the collections. Differences in qualifications, remuneration, and status

137. First Presidency letter to G. Homer Durham, April 5, 1978, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 14 folder 13, Utah State University; “Progress Report on ‘Altered Direction’ of the History Division (Directed by the First Presidency April 5, 1978 and Subsequent Meetings),” May 9, 1979, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 5 folder 6, Utah State University.

138. “Memorandum of Conference on Maintenance and Refinement of the Journal History,” January 16, 1979, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 5 folder 6, Utah State University; “Information and Instruction for LJA Secretary,” February 26, 1981, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.3 box 15 folder 6, Utah State University.

139. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, 214-215.

between the professions may have further contributed to friction and distrust among the staff in the different divisions.<sup>140</sup>

After the History Division's transfer, attempts were made to retrospectively apply contemporary understandings of the office as archival institution to its original activities. Durham, who had taken the scriptural title of Church Historian at the time of the division's realignment in 1978, reportedly told the department staff that "the Church Historian was never supposed to write church history."<sup>141</sup> While the accuracy of this statement may be debated, at the heart of that discussion should be the shifting definitions of historian and the work of historians over the course of the Church's history.

140. Most members of the History Division staff were required to have a Ph.D. in History or have a Master's degree and be working toward a Ph.D. See Leonard J. Arrington letter to Robert Chandler Jr., February 25, 1975, Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 4 folder 3, Utah State University. This difference in qualifications led in turn to salary differences, even for division administrators. For example, in 1973 it was proposed that the salaries of the Church Archivist and the Church Librarian be set at 68 percent of that of the Church Historian (see Joseph Anderson letter to the First Presidency, January 24, 1973; Leonard J. Arrington papers, LJAHA 1.2 box 19 folder 1, Utah State University). For additional instances of internal conflict, see Cory L. Nimer, "The Old Guard and Rearguard Actions: Professionalization and the Church Historian's Office," 124-126.

141. "Oral History Interview with Jeffery O. Johnson," 7.