

FORGED LDS DOCUMENTS AND CRACKED INK

After two and a half years of investigation into the documents and activities of the Mormon document dealer Mark Hofmann, we are now able to offer a book on the Salamandergate scandal which rocked Utah and the Mormon Church. This new book is entitled, *Tracking the White Salamander—The Story of Mark Hofmann, Murder and Forged Mormon Documents*.

“IT IS EXPLOSIVE”

On October 15, 1985, about a year and a half after we began our research into the authenticity of the documents Mark Hofmann was selling the Mormon Church and other collectors, we were startled to learn of two cruel murders. The first victim was a Mormon bishop by the name of Steven F. Christensen. Mr. Christensen picked up a box in front of his office which turned out to be a ‘booby-trapped shrapnel bomb.’ The *Deseret News*, April 15, 1986, reported:

In testimony Monday, an insurance representative [Janet McDermott] with an office directly across from Christensen’s office testified the force of the bomb blast knocked plaster off the walls of her office and sent glass flying. . . . she immediately ran behind her desk, fearing someone in the hallway had just been shot and that a gunman was in the hallway. “I crouched down,” she said, “I didn’t know what was going on.”

McDermott heard, not the sound of a gunman in the hall, but a “very high-pitched crying—like a little child dying,” she said, her voice cracking with emotion.

She walked out into the hall and found Christensen lying half in, half out of his office doorway. His chest was bloody. The crying noises she had heard were coming from Christensen, but they were much deeper now.

The amount of gun powder used in the pipe bomb together with the nails which were taped around the outside of the pipe insured that Christensen would

not survive the blast. It soon became apparent that the victim was the same man who bought the notorious “White Salamander Letter”—a letter which proved to be embarrassing to the Mormon Church. Later that morning another package exploded killing Kathleen Sheets. This package was addressed to her husband, J. Gary Sheets who was also a bishop in the Mormon Church. Mr. Sheets “had helped fund research that authenticated the [Salamander] letter.” The next day a bomb exploded in a car less than two miles from our house. Mark Hofmann, who sold the Salamander letter to Mr. Christensen, was critically injured in this blast.

Mark Hofmann had a reputation for dealing in very controversial Mormon documents. In fact, Brigham Young University Professor Ronald W. Walker recorded the following in his journal on January 18, 1984, after examining the Salamander letter for the first time: “. . . **it is explosive** . . . It confirms several other documents that have been recently found, indicating the

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A revealing study of the Salamandergate scandal. Contains a great deal of information on both the murders and the forgeries. This is the first book to print lengthy extracts from the preliminary hearing. An entire chapter is devoted to the Mclellin collection and its possible relationship to the murders. Another chapter deals with the embarrassing position the Mormon Church infds itself in and the possibility of a cover-up. This book also contains a number of photographs of important documents. The testimony from the hearing alson is well worth the price of the book.

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‘treasure-hunting’ activities of Joseph Smith prior to the organization of the Church” (*Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4, page 461). Mark Hofmann has not only had a great deal of experience in dealing with “explosive” Mormon documents, but he has now been seriously injured twice in actual explosions. Ironically, his profession as a Mormon document dealer began just after an explosion. The following information appeared in the magazine section of the *London Times*, March 30, 1986:

According to Bill Hofmann, his son Mark was seriously injured when, at the age of 12, he was playing with a chemistry set. Mark and his cousin were mixing a potion over a small burner when the test tube exploded. Mark was cut about the head by flying glass—his neck still bears the scars—and spent two weeks in bed recovering. During his convalescence he took up coin collecting.

According to Mark Hofmann, he “made the transition from coins to Mormon memorabilia when I was about 12. That’s when I bought my first Mormon item: a \$5 Kirtland Safety Society note (you know, the bank that folded). It was signed by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon” (*Sunstone Review*, September 1982, page 16). As the years passed, Mr. Hofmann’s documents became more and more controversial until he was finally accused of dealing with “historical bombshells” (*Utah Holiday*, January 1986). Finally, on Oct. 16, 1985, his career came to a tragic end when a real bomb exploded in his car. Even worse than the damage the bomb did to Mark Hofmann’s body, was the news that “police say Hofmann is considered not just a third victim but also a prime suspect in the Tuesday killings, . . .” (*Deseret News*, October 17, 1985). Investigators theorized that Hofmann was actually transporting a bomb meant for someone else, and, as in the case of the explosion when he was 12 years old, he had made a mistake which almost cost him his life.

In the last issue of the *Salt Lake City Messenger*, we reported that the Salt Lake County Attorney’s Office had not only filed murder charge against Mark Hofmann but it had also charged him with stealing hundreds of thousands of dollars from the Mormon Church and other unsuspecting victims through the sale of forged or nonexistent documents. In April 1986 a preliminary hearing began for Mark Hofmann which lasted into May and was called “the most complex and lengthy preliminary hearing in Utah history” (*Salt Lake Tribune*, May 13, 1986). On May 22, 1986, Judge Paul G. Grant decided that Mark Hofmann should be bound over for trial. One of the editors of this newsletter, Sandra Tanner,

attended all the sessions of the preliminary hearing. In addition to this, we were able to listen to a copy of the official tapes of the proceedings and to make lengthy extracts. Some of these extracts have been included in this issue of the *Messenger*.

HOFMANN’S ALIASES

At the preliminary hearing some very startling information came out that seemed to link Mark Hofmann to the construction of the bombs. The evidence showed that Hofmann used the alias “Mike Hansen” when ordering material for his forgery operation and that the same name was used by the person who bought important electronic components which were probably used in the bombs. The name “Mike Hansen” was originally discovered on a manila envelope found in Mark Hofmann’s basement. The name of a company, Utah Engravings, appeared on the opposite side of the envelope. Jorgen Olsen of Utah Engravings “identified the writing on the envelope as his own. He explained that the company uses previously used envelopes to put customer orders in, putting the customer’s name on the reverse side” (*Deseret News*, April 17, 1986). Olsen said that the name he wrote on the envelope was the name given to him by a customer who ordered an engraved plate for printing. When investigators searched through boxes at Utah Engravings, they found a negative used to make a plate to print the “so-called Jim Bridger notes allegedly sold by Mr. Hofmann to several investors for as much as \$5,000.” Hofmann sold the Jim Bridger notes as authentic documents actually signed with the American frontiersman’s “X.” Microscopic examination of the negative, however, proved beyond all doubt that Hofmann’s Jim Bridger notes were nothing but modern forgeries. Negatives for other forged documents were found at other engraving companies:

A Salt Lake engraver testified Thursday he prepared two magnesium printing plates for “Mike Hansen”—a man prosecutors identified in earlier court testimony as Mark W. Hofmann. . . .

Jack Smith, DeBouzek Engraving and Colorplate Co., told the court that on Dec. 5, 1984, a man who said his name was Mike Hansen ordered an engraving plate with the signature of famed American novelist Jack London. On Nov. 1 of the same year, Mike Hansen ordered an engraving that police later found reproduced on the back page of a hymn book belonging to Emma Smith, wife of the founder of the LDS Church.

Prosecutors said Thursday they will tie the two engraving plates to six felony theft and fraud counts Hofmann faces. (*Deseret News*, April 17, 1986)

Employees of Salt Lake Stamp testified that Mark Hofmann obtained four rubber stamps from them in 1982. These stamps have now been linked to the forgery of notes Mark Hofmann sold which were known as the “Spanish Fork Notes.” In December 1984 a “Mike Hansen” ordered another stamp which was used to falsify a book by Jack London to give it more value. The *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 18, 1986, reported the following concerning the receipt for this transaction:

The fingerprint of Mark W. Hofmann was found on a receipt bearing the same name investigators believe Mr. Hofmann used as an alias when he allegedly bought components used in last October’s deadly bombings, an expert testified Wednesday.

State Crime Laboratory Latent Print Examiner Scott Pratt told 5th Circuit Judge Paul G. Grant that a single print found on a receipt for a rubber stamp from the Salt Lake Stamp Company that was purchased by a “Mike Hansen” in December 1984 matched the print of Mr. Hofmann’s left hand ring finger.

It was the most substantial piece of evidence thus far in the prosecution’s attempt to link Mr. Hofmann to the purchase of mercury switches and battery packs experts have said are identical to those used in the shrapnel bombs . . .

Barbara Zellner, of the Denver based Cox-Clark Engraving Co., testified that a “Mike Hansen” ordered plates for the Deseret Currency. Investigators later determined that these plates were used to print counterfeit copies of this early Mormon currency. Mark Hofmann made tens of thousands of dollars when he sold these forged notes.

It is interesting to note that “Mike Hansen” gave the following address to the engraving company in Denver: 2730 West 25th Street. When we checked this address on our mailing list of those who receive the Salt Lake City Messenger, we found that it was very close to an address we had—i.e., 3730 West 25th Street in Denver. That the address only differed in the first digit seemed very suspicious. I later learned that the address on my list was that of Mark Hofmann’s brother-in-law. It appears, then, that when Mark Hofmann (using the alias “Mike Hansen”) was asked for an address by the engraving company, he just gave his brother-in-law’s address with one digit altered.

Detective Bell said that there were “a total of three” items seized from Hofmann’s home that had the “Mike Hansen” name on them. One receipt had a date of “1982” on it.

When taken together, the evidence clearly establishes that “Mike Hansen” is Mark Hofmann. One alternative to this conclusion might be to say that Mike Hansen is one of Mark Hofmann’s associates. If this were the case, however, Hofmann would have to know who this individual is because he ended up with and sold the forgeries that came from the plates. This explanation does not really hold water because Mark Hofmann’s fingerprint appears on a “Mike Hansen” receipt.

The link between the bomber Mike Hansen and Mark Hofmann is clearly brought out in an article by Mike Carter:

. . . Detective Bell said, almost a dozen agents were sent out to canvas area Radio Shack stores after an ATF agent, searching the scene of the Sheets homicide for the second time, located a mercury switch identical to a brand sold by the retail electronics firm. In that search, investigators turned up two receipts from different stores for the purchase of mercury switches, battery cases and 12volt lamps that an ATF agent later testified could be used to test a bomb’s firing circuitry.

One of those receipts has been entered into evidence at the hearing, but the clerk who made the sale was unable to identify Mr. Hofmann as the buyer.

That receipt bears the name “Mike Hansen.” Detective Bell testified the second receipt is made out to “M. Hansen.” The address on the receipts, 2034 E. 3900 South and 2056 E. 3900 South, are vacant lots, he said. (*Salt Lake Tribune*, April 17, 1985)

At the preliminary hearing it was revealed that “Mike Hansen” was not the only alias Mark Hofmann used. He also used the name “Mike Harris,” and when Detective Bell was asked if there were any other aliases, he said that Hofmann had used the name “Bill Edwards.”

SELLING TEMPLE RITUAL

In earlier issues of the *Messenger*, we have indicated that the first recollection we had of actually meeting Mr. Hofmann was in 1980. Recently we learned, however, that he may have been in our bookstore on June 16, 1978. On that day a young man came in and showed Sandra a copy of the Second Anointing—a highly secret ritual which was frequently performed in the early Mormon temples but is seldom even mentioned today. He claimed it had belonged to his grandfather and had come down through the family. Stamped at the top of the paper were the words “SALT LAKE TEMPLE,” and next to this was a handwritten notation which read: “Destroy this copy.” The man said he felt we should have a photocopy

of it. He stressed that his family would be very unhappy if they thought that he was turning it over to us, and he claimed that he did not dare reveal his name to us because he belonged to a very prominent Mormon family. Sandra thought that this man was somewhat thinner than Mark Hofmann is today and also that his hair was lighter. Nevertheless, she remembers that he would probably have been about the age that Hofmann was at that time.

In talking with a writer who was doing research concerning Mr. Hofmann's activities, we learned that investigators were looking into a document concerning the Second Anointing ceremony which A. J. Simmonds had purchased from Mark Hofmann. Mr. Simmonds was kind enough to send us a photocopy of the document and we compared it to the copy that had been given to us. We found that the two were identical. Simmonds revealed that he bought the document from Hofmann for \$60 in October 1979—over a year after we were given the photocopy. If Mr. Simmonds' recollection is correct, Mr. Hofmann must have been the one who brought the document to us. Simmonds seemed to recall that Hofmann told him at the time that he had already given a copy of the document to the Tanners.

Investigators are apparently skeptical concerning the authenticity of the document. The fact that the words "SALT LAKE TEMPLE" are stamped at the top causes us to doubt its validity because Hofmann used rubber stamps in some of his other forgeries. However this may be, Mr. Hofmann's plan must have been to obtain publicity for the document by getting us to publish it. If this were the case, he was probably disappointed. Since we had no pedigree for the document and didn't even know the name of the person who gave it to us, we did not feel safe to use it in any of our publications. Except for a few copies we gave to scholars who were interested, it has remained in our files since 1978. One can only speculate on what might have happened if we had taken the bait. Perhaps Mr. Hofmann would have used us as a publisher for his documents. As it turned out, however, the Mormon leaders became the ones who broke the news concerning most of his important "discoveries" at press conferences which they held. As Hofmann became more involved in dealing with the church, he naturally would have been worried that church leaders would find out that he had sold some of the secret temple ritual to Mr. Simmonds. This information could have had a very bad effect on his document business with the church. We have been told that he begged Simmonds not to reveal his part in the transaction.

FLAKY DOCUMENTS

In February 1984 we began to have some serious doubts concerning Mark Hofmann's Salamander letter, and in the March 1984 issue of the *Messenger* we commented concerning our "reservations" concerning its authenticity. We pointed out that there were "disconcerting" parallels to the Salamander letter in the book *Mormonism Unveiled*, which was published four years after the Salamander letter was supposed to have been penned. It was our questions with regard to the authenticity of the Salamander letter that led us "to take a closer look" at some of the other documents sold by Mark Hofmann (see *The Money-Digging Letters*, August 22, 1984).

Both Mark Hofmann and Lyn Jacobs originally told us that Jacobs was the one who discovered the Salamander letter. At Mark Hofmann's preliminary hearing, Lyn Jacobs acknowledged under oath that he had "fabricated" the story that he had obtained the Salamander letter in New England because Mr. Hofmann did not want any publicity:

Q—. . . did you have occasion to tell people that it was—that you were the one who located the item and purchased the item and that Mr. Hofmann was brought in to help you market the item?

A—Unfortunately, that is correct.

Q—And you're doing this under Mr. Hofmann's instruction?

A—Not instructions, under his request. Not his request that I fabricate a story, but that his request that I take full responsibility for the document. That was my decision, to fabricate a story several months later.

At the preliminary hearing the evidence against Mark Hofmann's documents was finally revealed to the public. We had always felt that the best way to examine Hofmann's documents would be to get them all together and see if there was something they shared in common that could not be found in other 19th century documents. For instance, if it could be shown that the paper or ink was exactly the same in many of Hofmann's documents, this would certainly cast a shadow of doubt on their authenticity. At the preliminary hearing we learned that experts did, in fact, examine the documents as a group and concluded that there were features that many of the Hofmann documents exhibited which indicated they were forgeries. William Flynn, a noted forensic document expert, testified concerning the research that revealed the documents were forgeries. Mr. Flynn is the

Chief Questioned Documents Examiner for the State of Arizona. He has been with “the Arizona State Lab for 14 years,” and prior to that he served as “the document examiner for the city of Philadelphia” for a period of about four and a half years.

William Flynn claimed he examined “about 461 documents.” In his testimony he disclosed that it was the contents of the ink used on the documents and the attempt to artificially age it that produced a flaky or cracked appearance which gave the whole scam away:

Q—With respect to the ink, did you find any peculiar or abnormal characteristics associated with any of the documents?

A—Yes.

Q—Can you tell us . . . what that would be?

A—Yes. On many of the documents, . . . there appeared a microscopic cracking on the surface of the ink. These appeared on the questioned . . . documents that we were examining.

Q—Besides the cracking, was there any other characteristics?

A—Yes. Under ultraviolet examination, on several of the questioned documents, there was a one-directional running of the inks or a constituent part of the inks, as if they had been wet.

Q—Were you able to determine if there had been any additions on any of the documents—any additional applications of ink?

A—Yes. On several of the documents, there were inks that were not consistent with the body of the document. That is to say that data had been added to the document with a different ink.

Q—Now, . . . besides these characteristics, was there anything common about the documents that you found these characteristics on?

A—Yes.

Q—What was that?

A—These anomalies that I spoke of all occurred on documents that had been dealt by the defendant in the case, Mark Hofmann.

Q—Can you tell us which documents these were?

A—Yes. The documents, in particular, that we found problems with were . . . the Anthon transcript, the Joseph Smith III Blessing, four different white notes, the Lucy Mack Smith document . . . the Josiah Stowell letter of June 18th, 1825, the document we call the E. B. Grandin contract, the Martin Harris–W.W. Phelps document called the Salamander letter, . . . the General Smith, General Dunham (I’m sorry)—Joseph Smith letter, the David Whitmer to Walter Conrad document, the document later called the Betsy Ross letter, the Solomon Spalding–Sidney Rigdon land deed, the letter to Brigham Young from Thomas Bullock, dated June 27, 1865, a

promissory note to Isaac Galland from Joseph Smith, a letter called the Maria and Sarah Lawrence letter, the Samuel Smith Bible, the Nathan Harris prayer book, the Bithel ToddPeter and David Whitmer document, and then later there were several types of currency that were also examined.

Q—Did you mention Jim Bridger in that? I’m not sure.

A—The Jim Bridger notes would have been part of the currency . . .

Q—Let me ask you this. Besides these particular ones that you’ve mentioned, associated with Mr. Mark Hofmann, were there any other documents out of the 461 or so that you have examined that exhibit these characteristics?

A—No.

Q—And were there any documents that were not associated with Mark Hofmann that exhibit those characteristics?

A—No.

Mr. Flynn went on to testify that he read in one of the old texts” concerning the “artificial aging of iron gallotannic ink by exposing it to ammonia. . . . After I read that, I made iron gallotannic inks of various types myself and exposed them to . . . both ammonia and sodium hydroxide, and found that . . . it did, indeed, artificially age the inks. . . . The sodium hydroxide, in particular, will immediately take the iron gallotannic inks and turn them a deep rust color on the paper. It wont crack the inks, however. It was not until I began adding some of the additives that were typically added to the inks of that time period, in particular, the sugars and the gums and probably the most . . . commonly used additive in that time period would have been gum arabic, . . .” Flynn explained that gum arabic “was commonly added to the ink to give it body, as a viscosity adjuster to adjust the thickness of the ink, and also as a preservative. . . . When I mixed the iron gallotannic inks and added either the sugars or the gum arabic and then artificially aged them with the sodium hydroxide, I got exactly the same phenomenon that I described in the examination of the questioned documents. The ink both artificially aged and cracked.”

When Mr. Flynn was asked why the ink cracked, he replied:

The cracking effect . . . on the surface of the ink takes place, I believe, because of the viscosity change that the gums and sugars undergo when they go from an acidic state to an alkaline state. . . . And its amazing, under a microscope, you can put a drop of sodium hydroxide on

iron gallotannic ink with gums or sugars and watch the ink crack. It will, as soon as the liquid portion evaporates. What remains will be a dark brown rusted ink with cracked surface morphology.

Flyn explained that the chemicals which cause the ink to artificially age can be put on a document in a number of different ways: "They can be fumed. . . . You can simply tape a document inside a tank and the fumes will attack the ink. You can spray them with a air gun. You can dip them."

It appears from William Flyn's testimony that the forger was tripped up by the use of gum arabic or sugars in the ink. Although I do not know that the ink found in the Hofmann documents was composed from the exact ingredients mentioned in the formula in Charles Hamilton's book (a book found in Hofmann's house), it is interesting to note that this formula "To Make Black Ink" calls for "one Ounce Gum Arabic" (*Great Forgers and Famous Fakes*, page 267).

Although William Flyn seems to have been the expert who solved the mystery of the cracked ink, George Throckmorton did a great deal of work on the documents. Paul Larson called Mr. Throckmorton "the only forensic document examiner now practicing in the State of Utah" (*Utah Holiday*, December 1985, page 84). In his testimony, Mr. Throckmorton said that "In this investigation, I examined 688 documents that were written in iron gallotannic ink." George Throckmorton, like William Flyn, testified that when many of Hofmann's documents were examined under a microscope, they had cracked ink. Mr. Throckmorton described the cracked ink as looking like the "skin of an alligator." He claimed that "There were a total, if I recall from my memory, of the 688 I observed, 21 that had this characteristic cracking effect." When Throckmorton was asked where the 21 documents that had cracked ink came from, he replied that it was his understanding that they all came "through Mark Hofmann." When he was asked if the ink on any of the remaining 667 documents showed evidence of cracking, he responded: "No, there was none."

George Throckmorton noticed that "many of the documents" had a "characteristic blue hazing effect under ultraviolet examination." Mr. Throckmorton experimented and found that ammonium hydroxide, which was used by William Flyn to artificially age the iron gallotannic ink, gave the documents a blue hazing effect under ultraviolet light:

The blue hazing effect which was observed could have been produced in two different manners . . . I noticed

in my personal tests that on some of the papers—some of the old papers that we had for experimentation purposes—some of those papers after being dipped or treated with ammonium hydroxide did leave sort of a blue hazing effect under ultraviolet light. Others also when they were treated with a sodium hypochloride solution—a very weak solution—it left a blue hazing effect on the documents. So the hazing effect could have been duplicated by either one of those procedures. I'm not sure which.

It appears, then, that a solution used to age the ink on the Hofmann documents could cause all the peculiar characteristics found on them—i.e., cracked ink, a blue hazing effect under ultraviolet light and a one-directional running of the ink. At the hearing William Flyn testified:

A—As I'll use it in my testimony, it [bleeding] refers to a portion of the ink that would normally be invisible but is made visible under ultraviolet light. On several of the documents, . . . some constituent part of the ink . . . ran from the characters. In most instances, it ran in a unidirectional way. That is to say, it appeared that the document had been held vertically and wet so that the running was down, in one direction. It was not even haloing, where the running extended outward evenly in all directions, but rather it was more like a one-directional running.

Mr. Flyn also gave this testimony concerning the one-directional running of the ink:

Q—. . . Did you find any indications of this same sign of running under ultraviolet light on any of the documents other than the Hofmann documents?

A—No.

Q—Out of all the hundreds you examined it was only on the Hofmann documents?

A—Yes. Of the 461, I did not see it on those documents.

In the book, *Tracking the White Salamander*, a great deal of testimony is given concerning the authenticity of the documents. What we have presented here, however, should be sufficient to convince the reader that the case against the Hofmann documents is based upon very solid scientific evidence.

SPALDING-RIGDON SCARE

In the *Salt Lake City Messenger* for April 1986, we printed the following:

Allen Roberts and Fred Esplin reveal that "Police sources indicate that Steve Christensen's personal journal records that Elder Hugh Pinnock asked Hofmann to

find for him two important items: the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon and something “too sensitive to mention,” that the late “Elders Mark E. Petersen and G. Homer Durham were most involved in prior to their deaths” (*Utah Holiday*, January 1986, page 58). It has been suggested that the item that is “too sensitive to mention” may be the gold plates of the Book of Mormon or a “seer stone.” Both of these suggestions appear unlikely. One thing that might qualify, however, is evidence that Solomon Spalding or Sidney Rigdon wrote the material which Joseph Smith used for his Book of Mormon. Although we have never put a great deal of stock in the theory, many critics of the Mormon church have maintained that Sidney Rigdon stole a manuscript written by Spalding and that this was used to create the Book of Mormon. If this idea could be proven, it would destroy the claim that the Book of Mormon was divinely inspired. Any hard evidence on this subject would certainly be “too sensitive to mention.” Like the 116 lost pages of the Book of Mormon, such “evidence” might be sold to the Mormon church for millions of dollars. This, combined with the secrecy that would surround its transfer to the church, could very easily lead to disagreements and perhaps even to murder.

We have recently learned that investigators have been looking into a document which was in the possession of Hofmann or Jacobs which has the signatures of both Solomon Spalding and Sidney Rigdon on it. The document apparently bears clear evidence of falsification.

At the Mormon Church’s press conference concerning the bombings, Apostle Dallin Oaks stated: “Mark Hofmann has shown Elder Pinnock a letter that he said was part of the [McLellin] collection . . .” (*Salt Lake Tribune*, October 27, 1986). When the preliminary hearing was held, it was revealed that the “letter” which Hofmann showed to Mr. Pinnock was actually the mysterious Spalding-Rigdon document which links the two men together. Hugh Pinnock, a member of the church’s First Quorum of Seventy, testified as follows:

Q—Could you tell us what transpired at that meeting?

A—. . . well, he reported he’d been able to get the collection . . . and showed me . . . a document that he reported was from that collection.

Q—Do you know what that item was?

A—It . . . was a deed or some legal document . . . between Asa and Solomon Spalding and Sidney Rigdon and some other parties. It dealt, if I remember correctly, with the transfer of property.

Q—Did he tell you anything else more about that particular item?

Hugh Pinnock seemed to believe that this document was genuine, and he probably realized that it could have a devastating effect if it became known by critics of the church. That Hofmann would show this particular document to Pinnock certainly supports the accusation that he was engaged in “an attempted blackmail of the Mormon church itself.”

As it turns out, the document is a very obvious forgery. Document experts have testified that the names Sidney Rigdon and Solomon Spalding were not on the document when it was originally written and that the date has been changed from 1722 to 1822. Even the altered date, however, presents a serious problem to those who are informed concerning the Spalding-Rigdon theory concerning the origin of the Book of Mormon. Solomon Spalding could not have signed any document in 1822 because he died in 1816!

In any case, although Hofmann represented to Pinnock that the document was part of the McLellin collection, he turned right around and sold it out from under the church. Steven Barnett gave some very revealing testimony concerning the Spalding-Rigdon document. Mr. Barnett claimed that “about the 18th of September, last year” (1985), Mark Hofmann came into Cosmic Aeroplane and showed him “a document with the signature of Sidney Rigdon and a Solomon Spalding.” He said that Mr. Hofmann told him that “it was probably going to be a controversial item” and that he would sell it to the store for “\$2,000.” Mr. Barnett asked for some time to do some research with regard to the Solomon Spalding signature, and Hofmann granted his request. Barnett went on to testify:

Q—What did you do?

A—I researched that evening and found out that the Solomon Spalding had died several years prior to the date on the item.

Q—Okay. What did you do with that information?

A—Mark called me the following day and I just informed him of the discrepancy of the date.

Q—What happened then? Did he respond?

A—Yes. He said that he’d check back with me later in the day.

Q—Did he do so?

A—Yes, he did.

Q—Tell us about that conversation.

A—Well, what he told me was, would I be interested in the item as a Sidney Rigdon autograph?

Q—And your response?

A—I thought that could be arranged but I wouldn't be able to pay as much money for it as such.

Q—And what did you pay him?

A—Two hundred dollars in two payments.

Q—A total of four hundred dollars?

A—Right.

At the preliminary hearing William Flynn gave this revealing testimony regarding the Spalding-Rigdon document:

Q—And as a result of your examination, were you able to make any findings concerning that document?

A—Yes.

Q—What are those findings?

A—The Solomon Spalding and Sidney Rigdon signatures that appear on that document were written with a different ink than the other text of the document and the other signatures that appear on the document.

Q—Were you able to determine if they were the same inks themselves?

A—Yes. It appears that the Solomon Spalding and Sidney Rigdon inks are the same inks within themselves but different than the remainder of the ink on...that document.

Q—Were you able to notice any other alterations or changes on that document?

A—Yes.

Q—What was that?

A—The date, anno Domini 1822, had been altered.

Q—Can you tell us from what to what?

A—It had been altered from anno Domini 1722 to 1822.

Q—And out of those eight signatures you mentioned, there are two that appear to be of a different ink.

A—Yes.

Q—And that is Spalding and Sidney Rigdon?

A—That's correct.

In his testimony George Throckmorton brought out the fact that the ink used on the alteration of the date and the two signatures was cracked (indicating, of course, that it was artificially aged). When Mr. Throckmorton was asked with regard to the 1822 date, he replied: "The number eight exhibited not only a cracking effect but also a diffusing or running effect, which was not found on the one or the other twos." Throckmorton also testified that the "Solomon Spalding signature also exhibited that characteristic cracking." When he was asked about the Sidney Rigdon signature, he responded: "That was the other place I observed the cracking." Mr. Throckmorton maintained that except for the three alterations, the document was genuine: "Other than

the change of the date—that's not an accurate date by any means—and also the two signatures, the rest of it appears to be a genuine document." Throckmorton was absolutely convinced that the document had been falsified: "I do not believe that those signatures nor the date as we discussed was originally put on that document, nor is it from that time period."

This document is certainly one of the crudest forgeries that Mark Hofmann ever sold. As we have already pointed out, even the altered date of 1822 does not fit historically because Solomon Spalding died in 1816! Another problem with this document is that it locates Spalding and Rigdon together in Connecticut at the time of the transaction. The evidence shows that Spalding spent his last years in Ohio and Pennsylvania, and Sidney Rigdon became a pastor in a Baptist church in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania in 1822. Even if Spalding had been alive in 1822, the only logical place for the two men to sign such a document would be in Pennsylvania. Another serious problem with the document is that the signature of Solomon Spalding does not resemble that found on a deed he signed in 1811. From all this it is obvious that the creator of this document did not do any real homework on the subject.

SCANDAL AFFECTS CHURCH

While some people originally subscribed to the theory that "the bombs were planted by people radically opposed to the teachings of the Mormon Church," the facts completely discredit such an idea. At this point it appears that the entire Salamandergate scandal grew out of an internal problem which took root within the Mormon Church itself. Almost all of those who played a role in the transactions which brought international attention to Salt Lake City were members of the Mormon Church. Mark Hofmann himself was at one time a missionary for the church. According to the Church Section of the *Deseret News*, October 20, 1985, "Hofmann . . . served in the England Southwest Mission, 1974-76." On February 4, 1986, the same newspaper said that on "one mission report of average proselyting hours, Hofmann's name ranks 49th out of 208 missionaries. Part of the time, Hofmann served in the mission office in Bristol." *Utah Holiday*, January 1986, page 53, reported that Hofmann married "in the Salt Lake LDS temple." In an interview published in *Sunstone Review*, September 1982, page 19, Mr. Hofmann described himself as "an eighth-generation Mormon, and my mother is a stake

Relief Society president right now.” Some of Hofmann’s closest associates (Lyn Jacobs, Shannon Flynn and Brent Metcalfe) were returned Mormon missionaries. Like Hofmann, Brent Metcalfe had served his mission in England. Lyn Jacobs was a missionary in Canada, and Shannon Flynn served in Brazil. One of the persons that Hofmann defrauded was Wilford Cardon. Mr. Cardon testified: “Mr. Flynn served a mission in Brazil and I was his mission president from July 1978 until the end of his mission.” Shannon Flynn introduced Mark Hofmann to Wilford Cardon, and Hofmann proceeded to talk Cardon into investing heavily in his schemes. Another faithful Mormon who lost a great deal of money by investing in Hofmann’s forgeries is Brent Ashworth. The Church Section of the *Deseret News*, June 23, 1985, said that Mr. Ashworth was “bishop of the BYU 82nd Ward.” On July 23, 1986, Brent Ashworth filed a lawsuit against Mark Hofmann in which he claimed that Hofmann had sold him many forgeries and that he had paid \$225,100 for the documents:

6. The total amount paid by the plaintiff to the defendant for said documents was \$225,100. . . .

16. The plaintiff had acquired a reputation in the community for being an expert in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and an authority on Church documents. The discovery that the documents which were sold to the plaintiff by the defendant were false and fraudulent and which were created by the defendant for the sole purpose of fraud and deception was equally newsworthy and the public portrayal has caused the plaintiff great embarrassment, humiliation and injury to his reputation and stature in the community, all to his general damage in an amount to be established upon proof. (“Brent Ashworth, Plaintiff, vs. Mark Hofmann, Defendant,” pages 2-3)

Alvin Rust, who invested in the McLellin collection and a number of Hofmann’s other forgeries, has served as a bishop in the Mormon Church. Steven Christensen and J. Gary Sheets, who invested in the Salamander letter and later had bombs delivered to them, were also bishops in the church. (Sheets’ wife, of course, opened the package addressed to him and died in the explosion.)

Mark Hofmann was well acquainted with Wade Lillywhite and Curt Bench who worked at the church’s Deseret Book. Many of Hofmann’s forgeries, in fact, were sold to the church’s bookstore. David Sorenson, who was to purchase the McLellin collection on the day Hofmann was injured, was serving as a mission president. Mr. Hofmann was well acquainted with the former LDS Church Archivist Donald Schmidt and sometimes met with Gordon B. Hinckley, of the church’s

First Presidency. Donald Schmidt testified that Hinckley and Apostle Boyd K Packer often gave approval for the church to purchase Hofmann’s documents.

Hugh Pinnock, of the First Quorum of Seventy, helped Hofmann find a buyer for the McLellin collection and secure a loan of \$185,000, and even Apostle Dallin Oaks found himself meeting with Hofmann.

One thing that must be very embarrassing for Mormon Church leaders is that they not only gave Hofmann money for forgeries, but that they also traded genuine material stored in the archives for bogus documents. At the press conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley said that the “Historical Department later traded him other documents of interest for the ‘Anthon Manuscript’” (*Salt Lake Tribune*, October 27, 1985). Hinckley also said that the Joseph Smith III Blessing “was acquired from Mr. Hofmann with a trade of historic materials . . .” (*Ibid.*).

The Hofmann documents which were not unfavorable to the Mormon Church were proudly displayed in Church publications. The Church’s *Ensign* magazine, December 1983, printed an article which was filled with pictures of documents that came through Hofmann. On the other hand, the unfavorable documents which the public were not aware of, were buried in the church’s vaults. In the *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 6, 1986, we find the following:

Sources close to the investigation have said the church apparently did little to authenticate many of these documents before they were purchased, stating that church historians felt “they had time and all eternity” to check their veracity. “They just wanted them off the streets,” the source said.

Although the story of Mark Hofmann and his document dealing is a real tragedy for everyone involved, it can provide some very helpful insights with regard to Joseph Smith and the origin of the Mormon Church. In fact, it even throws light on the actions of the present leaders of the Church. While it must be admitted that there are many dissimilarities between Mark Hofmann and Joseph Smith, there are some remarkable parallels between the two men. To begin with, Joseph Smith was only in his twenties when he brought forth the Book of Mormon. Because of his age many people have argued that it would have been impossible for him to produce a book like the Book of Mormon without divine help. Mark Hofmann was about the same age when he began making his discoveries. Hofmann’s followers have advanced an argument similar to that used for Joseph Smith—i.e., how could such a young inexperienced

man fabricate so many remarkable documents and fool Church leaders, historians and document experts?

Both Joseph Smith and Mark Hofmann had many devoted followers. It is often argued that the rapid growth and dedication of the early Mormon Church is a strong argument for Joseph Smith's divine calling. Joseph Smith himself once asserted:

I have more to boast of than ever any man had. I am the only man that has ever been able to keep a whole church together since the days of Adam. . . . Neither Paul, John, Peter, nor Jesus ever did it. I boast that no man ever did such a work as I. The followers of Jesus ran away from Him, but the Latter-day Saints never ran away from me yet. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pages 408-409)

While it is certainly true that Joseph Smith had many people who firmly believed in him, the same could be said of Mark Hofmann. In fact, the leaders of the Mormon Church had a great deal of faith in "Brother Hofmann" (see *Deseret News*, Church Section, May 3, 1980). In the *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 19, 1986, Mike Carter referred to the "blind trust of LDS officials in Bombing suspect Mark W. Hofmann . . ." Mr. Carter went on to say that it "was apparent that church leaders, including President Hinckley, trusted Mr. Hofmann implicitly . . ."

Another parallel between Mark Hofmann and Joseph Smith is that they both became famous because of a document they discovered. The *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1985, printed the following:

Indeed, the very founding of Mormonism was based on the discovery of a document of sorts. Church doctrine holds that . . . Joseph Smith was led by an angel named Moroni to a set of golden plates . . . Smith, the Mormons believe, translated a "reformed Egyptian" text on the plates into the Book of Mormon, which supposedly corrects the errors of other Christian religions.

Mark Hofmann, of course, found himself in the limelight when he discovered the Anthon transcript—purported to be Joseph Smith's own handwritten copy of the characters from the gold plates of the Book of Mormon. Mr. Hofmann went on to discover the first extant letter of Joseph Smith—the 1825 letter to Josiah Stowell. As if this were not startling enough, he found the last extant letter of Joseph Smith, written on the very day of his death. Prior to Hofmann's time, no one had ever found a letter signed by Martin Harris. Hofmann filled this gap by finding two letters signed by Harris—the Salamander letter of 1830 and the 1873 letter, which was written toward the end of his life. Both letters were extraordinary in their content. The 1873 letter contained

a glowing testimony to both the Book of Mormon and the angel who showed Harris the gold plates. The Salamander letter, on the other hand, turned out to be a devastating account of how Joseph Smith found the gold plates. Mr. Hofmann also found the earliest known letter of Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith. Besides these documents and many others, Hofmann claimed to have the McLellan collection—a collection containing extremely important and sensitive Mormon documents. Hofmann's finds even went beyond Mormonism. For instance, he found an original Betsy Ross letter. Then, to top it all off, he discovered the "Oath of a Freeman," the first document printed in colonial America. While the discovery of a copy of the Oath of a Freeman would be astounding enough, Mark Hofmann claimed that he found two copies of the document! Moreover, he said that these copies were worth \$1,500,000 each—making a total of \$3,000,000.

While Mark Hofmann's claims almost leave one breathless, they seem insignificant when compared with the claims of Joseph Smith. In *The Changing World of Mormonism*, we wrote the following about Joseph Smith:

The validity of Mormonism rests upon the claims of Joseph Smith. When he was a young man, his family moved to the state of New York. Within a few miles of his home there was a hill, which Joseph Smith later called the Hill Cumorah. According to Joseph Smith, this was no ordinary hill, for on this hill two of the greatest battles in history were fought. Apostle Bruce R. McConkie says that "both the Nephite and Jaredite civilizations fought their final great wars of extinction at and near the Hill Cumorah . . . which hill is located between Palmyra and Manchester in the western part of the state of New York. It was here that Moroni hid up the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated" (*Mormon Doctrine*, 1966, page 175).

Apostle McConkie further stated: "It is reported by President Brigham Young that there was in the Hill Cumorah a room containing many wagon loads of plates (page 454).

An ordinary person would probably see nothing of importance about this hill, but to the Mormons this is one of the most important places on earth.

While Joseph Smith was digging a well for Clark Chase, he found "a chocolate-colored, somewhat egg-shaped stone" (*Comprehensive History of the Church*, by B. H. Roberts, vol. 1, page 129). This might have been just an ordinary stone (maybe a little unusual in appearance), but to Joseph Smith it became a "seer stone." This stone was supposed to have been prepared by God, and through it Joseph Smith received revelations.

Joseph Smith claimed that on the night of September 21, 1823, he had a visitor. But this was no ordinary visitor, it was an angel sent from God. The angel told

Smith that gold plates were buried in the Hill Cumorah. The next day Joseph Smith found these plates, and, if his story is true, he made the greatest discovery in the history of archaeology. Archaeologists have searched for years trying to piece together the history of the ancient inhabitants of this land, but Joseph Smith turned over one stone and found all the answers. Underneath this stone he found a box which held the gold plates. The plates contained “an account of the former inhabitants of this continent, and the source from whence they sprang.” More important than this, however, they contained “the fullness of the everlasting Gospel.” According to the Mormon leaders, the Book of Mormon is far superior to the Bible because it contains the “pure” words of Christ. The Bible, they charge, has been altered by wicked priests. . . .

After the Mormon church was organized, Joseph Smith gave a revelation which stated that the Saints were to gather at Jackson County, Missouri. To the Mormon leaders, this was no ordinary land; they taught that it was the place where the “Garden of Eden” was located. Apostle McConkie explains: “The early brethren of this dispensation taught that the Garden of Eden was located in what is known to us as the land of Zion, an area for which Jackson County, Missouri, is the center place” (*Mormon Doctrine*, page 20).

In Daviess County, Missouri, Joseph Smith found some rocks which he claimed were the remains of an altar built by Adam. McConkie continues: “At that great gathering Adam offered sacrifices on an altar built for the purpose. A remnant of that very altar remained on the spot down through the ages. On May 19, 1838, Joseph Smith and a number of his associates stood on the remainder of the pile of stones at a place called Spring Hill, Daviess County, Missouri (*Mormon Doctrine*, page 21). . . .

In the year 1835 a man came to Kirtland, Ohio, with some mummies and rolls of papyrus. Joseph Smith examined the rolls and stated that “one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt” (*History of the Church*, vol. 2, page 236). (*The Changing World of Mormonism*, pages 21-23)

Joseph Smith translated the Book of Abraham, and it is printed today by the Mormon Church as a part of the *Pearl of Great Price*—one of the four standard works of the church.

While Mark Hofmann claimed to have some very old and important autographs, Joseph Smith’s collection was far superior. When Josiah Quincy visited Nauvoo in 1844, Joseph Smith showed him the papyrus rolls. Quincy later wrote:

“And now come with me,” said the prophet, . . . Some parchments inscribed with hieroglyphics were then offered us. . . . “That is the handwriting of Abraham,

the Father of the Faithful,” said the prophet. “This is the autograph of Moses, and these lines were written by his brother Aaron. Here we have the earliest account of the Creation, from which Moses composed the First Book of Genesis.” (*Figures of the Past*, by Josiah Quincy, as cited in *Among the Mormons*, 1958, pages 136-37)

After Joseph Smith’s death the Egyptian papyri were lost. Unfortunately for his claims, however, his collection was rediscovered in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (see *Deseret News*, November 27, 1967). Egyptologists translated the fragments from the very roll Joseph Smith declared was the Book of Abraham and found that it was nothing but a common Egyptian funerary text known as the “Book of Breathings.” This is a pagan text which has a great deal to do with Egyptian gods and goddesses but has nothing to do with Abraham nor his religion. (For a complete treatment of the Book of Abraham see our book, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 294-369-D.)

There is certainly an interesting parallel to Mark Hofmann with regard to this papyrus. It appears that both Smith and Hofmann misrepresented the papyrus they had obtained. Joseph Smith claimed that his papyrus was the Book of Abraham, when in reality it was nothing but a mortuary text written for a dead man named “Osiris Hor.” Mark Hofmann maintained that the papyrus he had was from the Joseph Smith Papyri which had been preserved in the McLellin collection. The truth, of course, was that Hofmann had obtained a common piece of papyrus from Kenneth Rendell.

Although Mark Hofmann’s actions can not be excused in the eyes of the law because of his background, we can not help but feel sorry for him. His involvement with Mormon history certainly could have played an important role in his problems. If we assume that he started out as a true believer in the church, the things he learned from his study of Joseph Smith and early Mormonism could have come as a shattering blow to his faith. Before Mark Hofmann went on his mission for the church, he would have been thoroughly instructed in the importance of Joseph Smith to those who wish to be good Mormons. For instance, in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, Section 135, verse 3, we read: “Joseph Smith, the Prophet and Seer of the Lord, has done more, save Jesus only, for the salvation of men in this world, than any other man that ever lived in it. . . . He lived great, and he died great in the eyes of God and his people; . . .” What a disappointment it must have been to Mr. Hofmann when he found out that Joseph

did not tell the truth concerning his involvement in polygamy. History reveals that by 1844, Joseph Smith had dozens of plural wives, yet when he was accused of have “six or seven young females as wives” on May 3, 1844, Joseph Smith replied:

What a thing it is for a man to be accused of committing adultery, and having seven wives, when I can only find one.

I am the same man, and as innocent as I was fourteen years ago; and I can prove them all perjurers. (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, page 411)

If Mark Hofmann had learned from his study of history that the first Prophet of his Church had been a man of impeccable honesty, it could have made a great difference in his life. Perhaps he would have continued his study of medicine and become a doctor. Instead, he finds himself accused of deceit and treachery. Alvin Rust claimed that Mr. Hofmann told him four stories with regard to the McLellin collection. In this respect Hofmann was no different than Joseph Smith. In *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 143-150, we demonstrated that the Mormon Prophet told a variety of different stories concerning his most important vision—the First Vision of 1820. In a manuscript written in his own hand in 1832, preserved in the Mormon Church Archives, Joseph Smith clearly taught that only one personage (Jesus) appeared to him in this vision. In an entry in Joseph Smith’s diary for 1835, also stored in the Mormon Church Archives, Joseph Smith related a different story. He claimed that there were many personages in the vision. In the official account, written in 1838, Joseph Smith asserted that both God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to him.

It is very clear that Mark Hofmann knew Joseph Smith deceived his people with regard to the Book of Abraham papyrus. Smith had stated that the papyrus dated back to the time of Abraham and contained his signature. When Egyptologists examined the papyrus they claimed that it was not written until about the time of Christ, which would be *almost two thousand years after Abraham’s time*. Even the church’s most noted apologist, Dr. Hugh Nibley, had to admit that “our Joseph Smith Book of Breathing’s” was written “in the first century AD” (*The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, page 3). Is it any wonder that when Mark Hofmann approached Kenneth Rendell concerning some papyrus he could pawn off as that used by Joseph Smith, he asked for “something from the first- or second-century A.D.” (*Deseret News*, October 28, 1985)?

When it comes to the forgery of historical Church documents, Mark Hofmann could have read a great deal

about Mormonism that might be used in an attempt to justify his actions. For instance, Mormon leaders claim that the Book of Mormon is a translation of an ancient history of the Nephites written on gold plates. The internal evidence in the book itself, however, clearly reveals that it is a 19th century production. It appears to have material taken from the Westminster Confession, which was not adopted until 1729 (see *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 68-69), and also reflects the anti-Masonic controversy which was raging in Joseph Smith’s time (*Ibid.*, pages 69-72). The most devastating evidence against the Book of Mormon, however, is its use of material from the Bible. That Joseph Smith plagiarized from the King James Version of the Bible in creating the Book of Mormon is evident to those who have made a careful comparison of the two books. In *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 74-79, we have cited over 200 places where the Book of Mormon used quotations from the New Testament. Most of these quotations were supposed to have been recorded in the Book of Mormon between 600 B.C. and 33 A.D. i.e., before the New Testament was even written!

Joseph Smith’s successors also seemed to have little regard for truthful history. The Mormon leaders actually forged the greatest portion (60%) of Joseph Smith’s *History of the Church* after his death. While it is true that they used carefully selected portions from Joseph Smith’s diaries and letters written by him, other portions were taken from newspapers and diaries written by other people and some material was created specifically to fill in vacancies in the record. The portions taken from other authors were changed to the first person in an obvious attempt to mislead the reader into believing that they were written by Joseph Smith himself. For a more complete treatment of this subject see *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 126-142; also our book, *Falsification of Joseph Smith’s History*.

What Brigham Young and other Mormon leaders did when they fabricated Joseph Smith’s *History* and claimed that it was written by Joseph Smith “HIMSELF” (*History of the Church*, vol. 1, title page), is exactly what happened in the production of the Salamander letter. In both cases other documents have been plagiarized to create what appears to be an original document written in the first person singular. While the *History of the Church* and the Salamander letter both contain a certain amount of material that is historically accurate, neither of them can be really depended upon because the authorship has been misrepresented. The *History of the Church*, of course, presents a pro-Mormon position, whereas the Salamander letter is anti-Mormon

in content. In both cases, however, the same deceptive method has been used.

Mr. Hofmann must have believed that his “discoveries” would tend to liberalize the Mormon Church as scholars and Church leaders came to accept them, and there is little doubt that this has turned out to be the case. Some Mormon scholars, in fact, have confessed that the Salamander letter served as the catalyst that led them to deeper studies regarding the connection between Mormonism and magic. Now that the documents have been exposed as forgeries, historians may have suffered some loss of credibility with the average member of the church. This would probably tend to strengthen the orthodox position in the church if it were not for another factor—i.e., the loss of credibility that the Mormon leaders have suffered. While it is true that both Mormon and non-Mormon historians were fooled, as a general rule historians do not claim to be inspired by God. The Mormon leaders, on the other hand, claim special guidance from the Lord. According to Ezra Taft Benson, the present Prophet, Seer and Revelator of the Mormon Church, “The Prophet Will Never Lead the Church Astray” (“Fourteen Fundamentals in Following the Prophets,” an address given at BYU, February 26, 1980; printed in *Following the Brethren*, page 5). President Benson claims that the leaders of the church have special discernment which is far superior to “earthly knowledge”:

FIFTH: *The Prophet is Not Required to Have Any Particular Earthly Training or Credentials to Speak on Any Subject or Any Matter at Any Time.*

Sometimes there are those who feel their earthly knowledge on a certain subject is superior to the heavenly knowledge which God gives to His Prophet on the same subject. . . . We haven’t yet had a prophet who earned a doctorate degree in any subject, but as someone said, “A prophet may not have his PhD but he certainly has his LDS.” We encourage earthly knowledge in many areas, but remember if there is ever a conflict between earthly knowledge and the words of the prophet, you stand with the prophet and you’ll be blessed and time will vindicate you. (*Ibid.*, page 6)

On page 10 of his address, President Benson said:

NINTH: *The Prophet Can Receive Revelation on Any Matter—Temporal or Spiritual.*

As I think of President Benson’s statements concerning the special powers of a prophet, I cannot help but remember a photograph of his predecessor, Spencer W. Kimball, the twelfth Prophet, Seer and Revelator of the Mormon Church, which appeared in the Church Section of the *Deseret News* on May 3,

1980. President Kimball is flanked by Mark Hofmann, President N. Eldon Tanner, President Marion G. Romney, Apostle Boyd K Packer and Apostle Gordon B. Hinckley. Neither President Kimball nor any of the other General Authorities seem to be able to detect anything wrong with either “Brother Hofmann” or the Anthon transcript—a document purported to contain the characters Joseph Smith copied from the gold plates of the Book of Mormon. Although President Kimball was supposed to be a “seer” and have the power to “translate all records that are of ancient date” (Book of Mormon, Mosiah 8:13), he was unable to translate the characters which appear on the Anthon transcript. Instead of using the “seer stone,” he examined the characters which appear on the transcript with a magnifying glass. Not only did he fail to provide a translation, but he was unable to detect that the church was being set up to be defrauded of a large amount of money and many items out of its archives. Moreover, he entirely failed to see the devastating and embarrassing affect this transaction and others which followed would have on the Mormon Church. If ever revelation from the Lord was needed, it was on that day in 1980 when Mark Hofmann stood in the presence of President Kimball.

While the Mormon leaders claim to have the same powers as the ancient Apostles in the Bible, their performance with regard to Mark Hofmann certainly does not match up to that of the Apostle Peter when he caught Ananias and Sapphira red-handed in their attempt to deceive the church with regard to a financial transaction: “But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?” (Acts 5:3).

As President Kimball got older, he became less able to function and President Gordon B. Hinckley took over many of his responsibilities and became to all appearances the acting president of the church. Hinckley, who stood with President Kimball in the 1980 photograph, was deceived on a number of occasions by Mr. Hofmann. He, together with Apostle Boyd K Packer (also shown in the picture), approved many of the deals the church made with Hofmann. It appears that if the Mormon Church was ever led by revelation, it has been lacking since Mark Hofmann came into the church offices with the Anthon transcript. The inability of the Mormon leaders to detect the religious fraud perpetrated upon them raises the question as to their testimony with regard to the Book of Mormon. After all, if they could not determine that Hofmann’s documents—which were only 150 years old—were forgeries, how can we trust their judgment with regard to a record which is supposed to be ten times as old? They

have seen and inspected Mark Hofmann's documents, but they have never seen the gold plates the Book of Mormon was translated from. While it could be possible that Joseph Smith really had some kind of metal plates, how would the present leaders of the Mormon Church know if they were genuine or fabricated? With regard to the inability of the Mormon leaders to detect that the Hofmann documents were fraudulent, a person might try to argue that these documents were not really important spiritual writings, and therefore the Lord did not see fit to intervene when the General Authorities examined them. The truth of the matter, however, is that they contain extremely important material directly relating to spiritual affairs. The Salamander letter, for example, changes the story of the Angel Moroni appearing to Joseph Smith to that of a cantankerous and tricky "old spirit" who transforms himself from a white salamander and strikes Joseph Smith. Moreover, some of the purported Joseph Smith writings which Hofmann sold to the church contain revelations from the Lord Himself. For instance, the Joseph Smith III Blessing document gives this message from the Lord: "Verily, thus saith the Lord: if he abides in me, his days shall be lengthened upon the earth, but, if he abides not in me, I, the Lord, will receive him, in an instant, unto myself." The 1838 letter of Joseph Smith to his brother, Hyrum, is in its entirety a revelation purporting to come from the Lord. It begins with the words, "Verily thus Saith the Lord," and ends with the word "Amen." The fact that the Mormon leaders were unable to recognize the spurious nature of these revelations casts doubt upon their ability to discern the truthfulness of the other revelations given by Joseph Smith. It has always been claimed that it is virtually impossible for a person to write a revelation that would compare with Joseph Smith's. It now appears that there is someone who can write revelations comparable to Joseph Smith's and that it is even possible to get them past the scrutiny of the highest leadership of the Mormon Church.

The Mormon leaders teach that there has been "a restoration of the gospel" through Joseph Smith the Prophet. Smith restored the Book of Mormon and a great deal of other ancient Scripture. All of these purported Scriptures have no provenance—i.e., there is no proof of their existence prior to the manuscripts written on what was modern paper during Joseph Smith's lifetime. In *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* pages 375-376, we wrote the following:

The Apostle Pratt's statement that there is "more than one thousand times" the amount of evidence to prove the Book of Mormon than to prove the Bible is certainly a misrepresentation. We have already shown that the only evidence for the Book of Mormon is the testimony of the witnesses and that this testimony can not be relied upon.

As far as historical and manuscript evidence is concerned, Joseph Smith's scriptures have absolutely no foundation. The "records of the Nephites," for instance, were never cited by any ancient writer, nor are there any known manuscripts or even fragments of manuscripts in existence older than the ones dictated by Joseph Smith in the late 1820's. Joseph Smith's Book of Moses is likewise without documentary support. The only handwritten manuscripts for the Book of Moses are those dictated by Joseph Smith in the early 1830's. Since Joseph Smith's revelations in the *Doctrine and Covenants* do not purport to be translations of ancient records, we would not expect to find any ancient manuscript evidence concerning them. There is one revelation, however, which purports to be a translation of a "record made on parchment by John and hidden up by himself." This revelation is found in the *Doctrine and Covenants* as Section 7. There is no documentary support for this revelation. The Book of Abraham purports to be a translation of an ancient Egyptian papyrus. We have already shown, however, that the original papyrus is in reality the Egyptian Book of Breathings and has nothing to do with Abraham or his religion. Therefore, we have no evidence for the Book of Abraham prior to the handwritten manuscripts dictated by Joseph Smith in the 1830's. It would appear, then, that there is no documentary evidence for any of Joseph Smith's works that dates back prior to the late 1820's.

When we turn to the Bible, however, we find a great deal of evidence—some of which dates back more than 2,000 years—showing that the Bible was known and used in early times. While this in itself does not prove that the Bible is divinely inspired, it does give a person a basis for faith.

Mark Hofmann seems to have produced his own "restoration" of religious documents from the past. While he has not pretended to find the signatures of Abraham, Moses and Aaron, he has "discovered" Mormon material which was supposed to have been written as far back as the 1820's. Mr. Hofmann restored important letters and revelations from Joseph Smith as well as material from other prominent Mormons. Hofmann's "restoration" was even more convincing than Joseph Smith's because he not only gave us the text of these significant documents, but he claimed to have the very original copies on paper dating back to the period in which they were supposed to have been written.

The exposure of Mr. Hofmann’s scheme to undermine the Mormon Church does not really help the church. On the contrary, it shows how gullible we all can be and that even the Prophet of the Mormon Church can be deceived. Once the fallibility of the present Prophet, Seer and Revelator is perceived, one begins to wonder about Joseph Smith himself. When the searchlight is focused upon him, we see that he looks remarkably like Mark Hofmann.

The action of the church leaders in buying up and suppressing Mark Hofmann’s documents raises another important question: if they were willing to pay thousands of dollars to buy forgeries which tended to discredit Joseph Smith, how many authentic documents have they bought up and locked away in the church Archives and the First Presidency’s vault? The fact that the General Authorities of the church believed in and bought Mr. Hofmann’s forgeries reveals a great deal about their own thinking concerning the original Prophet. They must have known from other things they have read that Joseph Smith was deeply involved in money-digging and magic or they would not have been so easily persuaded to buy Hofmann’s documents. The impression one gets is that the Mormon leaders know that Joseph Smith was not really like the image the church has presented to the people, but that they must maintain that image at all costs—even if it means they have to buy up and suppress documents.

We are only able to present a portion of the results of our investigation into the Hofmann affair in this issue of the *Messenger*. For a detailed study see our publication, *Tracking the White Salamander*.



AN ETERNAL COVER-UP

The Salamandergate scandal reminds us of an article which we published in the January 1975 issue of the *Messenger*. Even though it was written concerning President Nixon’s problems, it could certainly apply to the Hofmann situation. We cite the following from that article:

Although the Watergate scandal has really hurt our country, there is a real lesson that we all can learn from it—that is, that it does not pay to try and cover our sins. The Bible warns: “. . . be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23). It is true that we can often hide our sins from men, but Jesus tells us that we cannot hide them from God: “. . . there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known” (Matthew 10:26).

Our former President must have firmly believed that his tapes would never come to light, but through some very strange circumstances they did become public and caused his downfall. This is certainly a tragic example, and we cannot help but feel sorry for him and for his family. Nevertheless, it teaches us that even the President of the United States does not have the power to cover up his sins.

It is certainly ironic that Richard Nixon should be trapped by his own tapes. The Bible, however, tells us that we all stand in jeopardy of being convicted by our own words at the judgment: “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

Although we do not feel that God has a secret tape recorder which he uses to bug us with, we do believe He has knowledge of everything through his Holy Spirit. The Bible says that God not only knows our every word and action but also the “thoughts and intents” of our heart: “For the word of God is quicker, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12-13).

In I Corinthians 4:5 we read that the Lord “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: . . .” Romans 2:16 tells us that “God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus it is clear that after death our memory will be restored and that if we have continued in sin and selfishness it will condemn us (see Luke 16:25). The Bible tells us that we are all sinners and in need of God’s forgiveness. To refuse to face this fact is to live a life which is founded on cover-up, and this will eventually prove disastrous to our souls. In the story of the Pharisee and the publican Jesus shows that we can appear to be very religious, but if we have not acknowledged that we are sinners in need of God’s grace we are still under condemnation.

Now, while the Bible teaches that it is impossible for us to cover up our sins, it does state that God Himself can cover them up if we will turn to him and ask for forgiveness:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7-9)

In Psalms 32:1 we read: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” This is the cover-up that really works. In Psalms 103:12 we find this statement: “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Isaiah 43:25 gives this assurance: “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.” Those who have received the Lord into their hearts know the great joy and peace that comes from accepting God’s forgiveness. The Bible says:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

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