



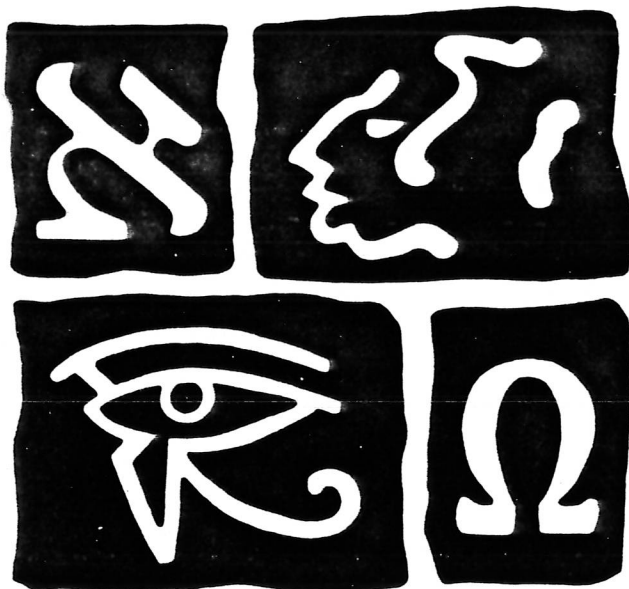
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

## **FARMS Preliminary Reports**

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**George Reynolds and  
Janne Sjodahl:  
Biographical Notes**

Bruce Van Orden

VAN-82

**Preliminary  
Report**

FOUNDATION FOR  
ANCIENT RESEARCH AND  
MORMON STUDIES



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(1842-1909)

George Reynolds--

George Reynolds, a convert to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Great Britain, was the first Mormon to author an extensive commentary to the Book of Mormon. It was called The Story of the Book of Mormon (1888). Over a 20-year period A Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon (1900) was also compiled. Upon the death of George Reynolds in 1909, Susa Young Gates, editor of the Young Women's Journal, said, "Brother Reynolds was so quiet and unassuming that very few knew what a fund of information he possessed. . . . Brother Reynolds will live through his books."<sup>1</sup> The same magazine praised Reynolds for his literary work on the Book of Mormon: "If each of us, before coming to this earth, was indeed privileged to choose our own supreme gift or blessing while here, surely Elder George Reynolds chose to have his name more closely associated with the Book of Mormon than that of any other Latter-day Saint except the Prophet Joseph Smith."<sup>2</sup>

Reynolds, a member of the First Council of Seventy from 1890-1909, was born January 1, 1842, near London, England. He was first drawn to Mormonism at age seven when he overheard demeaning conversations about Mormons in his father's tailor shop. At nine he was introduced to the church by a maid at his grandmother's home. George quickly embraced Mormonism and requested baptism, however, his parents would not consent. So, at age fourteen, George went to another branch of the Church where he was unknown and was baptized.<sup>3</sup>

As a young man, Reynolds was active in the LDS Church in England. He fulfilled a mission there before emigrating to the United States in 1865. At the end of 1865 he went to work for President Brigham Young. For the rest of his life, Reynolds worked for the Church. He was secretary to each of the presidents of the Church from Brigham Young to Joseph F. Smith.

In 1874 the federal government attempted to indict leaders of the Church under the Morrill Act of 1862 which prohibited polygamy. The Church leaders, believed the law unconstitutional but agreed to furnish a test case, and George Reynolds was chosen. In 1879 his guilty verdict was sustained in the Supreme Court and Reynolds served a year and a half in prison for his "crime."<sup>4</sup>

In 1890 George Reynolds was sustained as a member of the First Seven Presidents of the Seventies (the First Council of Seventy.) As a general authority, Reynolds was also called to the Superintendency of the Deseret Sunday School Union (the general Sunday School.) George Reynolds continued his activities in the Church until 1907, when he suffered a breakdown attributed to overwork. He died August 9, 1909.

Reynolds wrote hundreds of articles for Church Periodicals and Sunday School lesson manuals. He published six books. In the 1870's he was the assistant editor to the Deseret News, the editor of the Millennial Star in 1871 and wrote for Juvenile Instructor. Several friends urged George to compile his serial articles into a book. Consequently, many of his book-length publications are from magazine articles.

His first two books were Are We of Israel? and The Book of Abraham: Its Authenticity Established (both 1879). Both were

readily accepted as authoritative commentaries, although they reflected a certain Anglo-Israel bias.

While in the Utah Territorial Penitentiary, he wrote approximately eighty periodical articles on the Book of Mormon. These appeared in the Juvenile Instructor, the Woman's Exponent, the Deseret News, the Utah County Enquirer (of Provo), the Contributer, and the Millennial Star.

Reynolds' writings on the Book of Mormon were enthusiastically accepted. This is evident in Bishop Christian August Madsen's comment to George: "Your literary works have been read with great interest both for the writings themselves, and because you was /sic/ the writer."<sup>8</sup> By popular demand a collection of Reynolds' articles on the Book of Mormon was published as The Story of the Book of Mormon in 1888.

Reynolds' writings in prison did not come easily. Living conditions at the Utah Penitentiary were far from ideal. Junius Wells described Reynolds' physical difficulties with writing projects:

We would think it a particular hardship to be obliged to nail our copy on the prison wall, and as we sat on a small stool facing it, write on a lapboard. In this manner Brother Reynolds has spent many a day in the preparation of matter for publicataion; the cold often benumbing his fingers, the dust blinding his eyes, and gusts of wind flurrying his paper all over the prison yard.<sup>10</sup>

Here he began his Book of Mormon concordance. "On 28th I commenced on a concordance of the Book of Mormon after the style of Cruden's Concordance of the Bible. I worked on this continuously from this time to the date of my liberation."<sup>11</sup> He copied as many as 350 passages a day. At his release in January of 1881,

George had completed 25,000 entries in his concordance. Nearly twenty years later he published his monumental work.

Elder B. H. Roberts, later a close colleague on the First Council of Seventy, remarked,

I find myself much indebted to /George Reynolds/ because of the great achievements in this field of research.

Roberts then complimented Reynolds for several significant writings on the Book of Mormon, and added,

. . . Last, the greatest achievement of all, I thank him for his "Complete Concordance of the Book of Mormon." The amount of patient, pains-taking labor required for the production of this magnificent work will never be known to the general reader. Only the close student of the Nephite Scriptures will every really appreciate it.<sup>12</sup>

Once out of prison, Reynolds wrote The Myth of the "Manuscript Found," or the Absurdities of the "Spaulding Story" which came out in 1883 as one in "The Faith-promoting Series" published by the Juvenile Instructor Office for the "Instruction and Encouragement of young Latter-day Saints." In this short work Reynolds endeavored to show that the upholders of the Spaulding myth "are not only at variance with each other, but that all their assertions are inconsistent with the well-known facts associated with its discovery. . . ."<sup>13</sup>

Reynold's commentary, The Story of the Book of Mormon, details the story line of the Book of Mormon and observes the domestic life of its peoples.

In 1891 Reynolds published his A Dictionary of the Book of Mormon, Comprising its Biographical, Geographical and Other Proper Names.

In 1890 Reynolds published a Book of Mormon Chronological Chart.

# FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Susa Young Gates, "George Reynolds," Young Women's Journal 20 (September 1909): 463.

<sup>2</sup>"Book of Mormon Chronological Chart by George Reynolds," Young Women's Journal 11 (June 1900): 288.

<sup>3</sup>Grant R. Hardy, "George Reynolds: The Early Years" (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972), pp. 8-11.

<sup>4</sup>See unpublished paper "George Reynolds and the Polygamy Test Case" by Bruce A. Van Orden in possession of the author.

<sup>5</sup>"Journal of George Reynolds, 1881-1904" located in the archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>6</sup>See unpublished (as yet) paper "Anglo-Israelism and Its Influence on Mormon Theology" by Bruce A. Van Orden presented at the 1982 Sunstone Theological Symposium, Salt Lake City, Utah, 28 August 1982.

<sup>7</sup>See unpublished (as yet) paper "George Reynolds--First Prisoner for Conscience' Sake" by Bruce A. Van Orden in possession of the author. A sample of the titles are "Laws of the Nephites," "Moroni's Title of Liberty," "Agriculture Among the Nephites," "Domestic Life Among the Nephites," "Life of King Benjamin," (there were over thirty of the Life of \_\_\_\_\_ series), "The Historians of the Nephites," and "The Art of War Among the Nephites."

<sup>8</sup>Letter from Christian August Madsen, Gunnison, Utah, to George Reynolds, Utah Territorial Penitentiary, 17 December 1880, located in the Reynolds Collection, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>9</sup>"Correspondence," (20 September 1879), The Millennial Star, 41 (20 October 1879): 669.

<sup>10</sup>Junius F. Wells, "A Living Martyr," The Contributor, February 1881, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup>"Journal of George Reynolds," Vol. 5, May 1880.

<sup>12</sup>B. H. Roberts, New Witness for God, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1909), 3:560.

<sup>13</sup>George Reynolds, The Myth of the "Manuscript Found," or the Absurdities of the "Spaulding Story," (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883), preface.

<sup>14</sup>George Reynolds, The Story of the Book of Mormon, (Salt Lake City: Jos. Hyrum Parry, 1888), preface.

Janne M. Sjodahl-- (1853-1939)

Janne M. Sjodahl was from Sweden and was a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He became one of the leading scriptural scholars in the Church. The Improvement Era paid tribute to Sjodahl by saying, "As a student of the Book of Mormon he had few equals and probably no superiors."<sup>6</sup>

Sjodahl was born November 29, 1853, in Karlshamn, Sweden. As a young man he trained to be a Baptist minister. After extensive ministerial training in England, Sjodahl served in the prominent position of secretary of the Norwegian Baptist Union. There he learned of the Mormons. Sjodahl was excommunicated from the Baptists for alleged moral misbehavior in 1866. He then traveled to Utah to investigate the Mormons himself.<sup>1</sup> He settled in Manti and was soon baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Sjodahl immediately began to translate the Doctrine and Covenants into Swedish. His work was interrupted in 1888 while he served a 2-year mission in Palestine and in Switzerland. He returned to Salt Lake City to work for the Deseret News. He was editor-in-chief from 1907 to 1914. In 1914 he was called on another mission. He served in England until 1919 as the editor of the Millennial Star. While in England, he wrote the basic text of The Doctrine and Covenants Commentary, with his mission president, Elder Hyrum Mack Smith, of the Twelve Apostles, as co-author.<sup>2</sup>

After returning to America, Sjodahl worked with the Improvement Era and the Church Historian, though he was well into his retirement. In 1920 he was called to assist the revision of the index and footnotes for the Book of Mormon. The revision was for a new edition which was published in 1921. This edition of the Book of Mormon was used until the new edition appeared in 1981.



Sjodahl wrote articles on diverse subjects for many periodicals. Most of his articles on the Book of Mormon were written as a staff member for the Millennial Star. He also authored Joseph Smith, Was He a Prophet of God?, The Reign of the Antichrist, and An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon.

Sjodahl published Introduction in 1927. Much of it had appeared in Church publications over the previous ten years. The text deals little with the theological concepts of the Book of Mormon. Instead, it deals with ethnological data, some from legendary sources in the New World. Sjodahl drew his own conclusions, favorable to the Book of Mormon.

Sjodahl also provided a lengthy "Key to Book of Mormon Geography," wherein he reviewed four major geographical theories in existence and proposed his own. In 1921 he had attended what was probably a "quasi-official" meeting at Church headquarters on the question of geography.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the rest of his life, Sjodahl kept up his enthusiasm on Book of Mormon geography.<sup>4</sup>

Sjodahl's name is often linked with George Reynolds as the co-author of the seven-volume Commentary on the Book of Mormon. The set was actually edited by Phillip C. Reynolds, son-in-law of Sjodahl and son of Reynolds, after the death of the two men.

Janne Sjodahl labored until his death in his eighty-sixth year. He died June 23, 1939. Sjodahl was in the process of writing the comprehensive Book of Mormon commentary during the last four years of his life. It was half-completed at his death.<sup>5</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bernt G. Lundgren, "Janne Mattson Sjudahl--Baptist Minister, Convert to Mormonism, Editor, Author, and Missionary," (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971), pp. 16-18. Lundgren believes that the Baptists' accusation may have been a front because they were upset that Sjudahl was investigating Mormonism.

<sup>2</sup> Lundgren, pp. 59, 80-83.

<sup>3</sup> Davis Bitton, Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies, (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), item number 2243, reports the existence in the LDS archives of a diary of Janne M. Sjudahl covering the years 1920-23. Bitton reported in his synopsis of the diary about the 1921 meeting and the participants. Unfortunately the Sjudahl diary is unavailable for research (according to James L. Kimball, Jr., an archivist) due to the diary's unorganized condition.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce A. Van Orden, "George Reynolds and Janne M. Sjudahl on Book of Mormon Geography," Thetean, (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1982), pp. 71-75.

<sup>5</sup> Lundgren, p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> "Janne M. Sjudahl Manuscript File," located in the archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, as quoted in Lundgren, p. 73.