

# FEW KNEW HER HISTORY

by *Howard S. Hampton*

Mormonism has always been shrouded in mystery. The most that many know about the Mormon Church—or to give it its correct name: the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints—is that it was founded in the 1830s by a “prophet” named Joseph Smith. Some may even add that he was named after his father. The most that many will know, is the inconvenient knock on the front door from two Mormon missionaries.

In November, 1945, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., published a book titled, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, which was the first biography of Joseph Smith that went beyond being either a hagiography or a libel. The book was authored by Fawn Brodie, a member of the illustrious McKay family; a family that was to bring forth a “prophet”, in the person of David Oman McKay, who was to eventually leave an indelible mark on the Mormon Church.

Fawn Brodie didn’t set out to write a biography of Joseph Smith. Rather she fell into the task, when she set about examining “how the *Book of Mormon* came to be written”. It was during the writing of her M.A. thesis, that in response to a question, she came to realise that the preferred explanation offered by the Latter Day Saints church, was contradicted by both the *Book of Mormon* itself; and several of the “revelations” contained in the *Doctrine and Covenants*—the rule-book of the Church. As Brodie got into researching the question of the authorship of the *Book of Mormon*, she found that there was no “good biography of Joseph Smith”, and she found this hindered her in this task. She decided that when she was free from the constraints of academia, that she would write a history of the prophet.

She had recently married, and her husband, Bernard Brodie, a secular Jew, was interested in her religious beliefs—though without any intention of converting. She was embarrassed by the available biographies that had been published by the Church’s publishing houses, and found it difficult to respond to his questions in an intellectually credible way. Here, she found another

reason for her project: the question of Joseph Smith's credibility as a prophet of God. From a Jewish perspective, Joseph Smith's claim to being a prophet, was at variance to the Hebrew conception of prophecy and the role of a prophet in the Hebrew eschaton. To her, this was something that "...was crying out for some explanation." When she began her initial research in 1938, she found that she was involved in a "compelling detective" case, because she found that the Church's libraries and historical resources and documents were closed to her, in spite of the prestige that flowed from being a member of the McKay family. The Church was already deathly afraid of its history.

Brodie was interested in biographies, and she initially thought that the project would provide the experience she felt necessary to undertake her political biographies and other works of history; works which were already forming in the back of her mind. The area of her academic training was in English literature, and she had little knowledge of the "science" of historiography. Drawing on the knowledge of her husband—a political scientist of note—, she was able to wrestle with the practical problems of dealing with historical documents, and what they meant.

After completing her M.A. degree, she took a position as a research scholar, which gave her access to Chicago's Harper Library, which housed books and historical materials germane to the area of her project. In addition, she found books, letters, and newspaper reports of the early years of Joseph Smith, and anthropological works which related to the commonly held belief that the Indians were in fact the long Lost Tribes of Israel. In addition, there were drafts of sermons by Protestant ministers and preachers, and documents which related to such religious leaders as William Miller and Mary Baker Eddy—the latter being the founder of the Christian Science movement.

By the summer of 1939, a disturbing picture was emerging about the character and early history of Joseph Smith. Writing to one of her other uncles, Dean R. Brimhall, she related her conclusions from the research she had been conducting. She said that she saw in the *Book of Mormon*, the influence of contemporary New York society, and controversies that had been generated by the lost tribe theory; the exterminated race theory; the anti-Masonry—which culminated in the eventful year of 1827, and the calamitous financial crash of that year—and

anti-Catholicism. Revealing her ultimate goal, she added “I hope sometime to be able to turn out a genuinely scholarly biography...” of Joseph Smith.

When her younger brother, Thomas B. McKay, returned in the autumn of 1939, from his mission to Nazi Germany, Brodie overcame the reluctance of involving her family in the consequences of her research. The younger McKay was very much the Mormon elder and supporter of the Church; but still took an interest in what Fawn was doing in the Harper Library. According to Newel G. Bringhurst, this interest “generated great discussions on much of the material that went into the biography, with Fawn and Thomas differing sharply in their [respective] views.” According to Thomas McKay, he “...would look at it from the aspect of one who is thoroughly convinced that Joseph Smith was a prophet...[while Fawn was] convinced that he was not a prophet.” However, this was an inaccurate rendering of Fawn Brodie’s position. She was in fact a believer; at least until she was excommunicated by the hierarchy of the Mormon Church, with David Oman McKay taking the lead in this procedure.

Many Mormon scholars have pointed to the influence of her Jewish husband as being responsible for her indiscretion and loss of faith. But it wasn’t a loss of faith that led to her being excommunicated. Rather, it was the lack of strong evidence supporting the most important of the historical claims made on behalf of Joseph Smith, and the fact that he does not seem to have been made of the sterling quality that God has generally demanded of his servants and prophets. Particularly galling to her, were the accounts of the “money digging” activities that Smith engaged in during his early years. These activities were blithely swept aside by her younger brother, Thomas McKay, as being a revenue generation activity, and that he had not proclaimed to the world that he was in fact a prophet of God. And as an afterthought, he added that money-digging was a very “respected profession” at the time.

Her husband, Bernard Brodie, was a noted scholar in his own right, and was able to provide the kind of critical assistance that she didn’t get from her Mormon scholar colleagues. While he was fascinated by Mormonism, he didn’t depart, during his lifetime, from his own profession as a secular Jew. He did, however, moderate Fawn Brodie’s views, concerning the obvious fraud that Smith was perpetrating on his followers, by “urging [her] to look at the man’s

genius, to explain his successes, and to make sure that the reader understood why so many people loved him and believed in him. If there is any real compassion, and I believe there is, it is more the result of the influence of my husband than anybody else.”

While the Church authorities have looked to the influence of her husband as being responsible for her departure from the “faith”, it must be said that she was a faithful Mormon until the day the Church excommunicated her. It was the Church’s actions, not the nature of the beliefs held by her husband, that led to her final break with the Church. Fawn Brodie was the first person who has examined the early years of history of the Church and look at the evidence with a dispassionate eye: the eye of a historian. It was the first time that the history of the Mormon church had received such attention. Up till then, there was the history that had been penned by Joseph Smith himself. And this volume had been followed by further additions produced by the General Authorities, when the church moved to Utah, following the death of Smith under a hail of bullets.

Smith was tried in 1826 for “crystal-gazing”, which related to his money-digging activities. This “respected profession” was designed to earn an income for himself, and later for his wife. Brodie saw in this activity, of which the court records of one of these cases involving money digging, testified, that he “laid a book upon a white cloth, and proposed looking through another stone which was white and transparent, held the stone to the candle, turned his back to the book, and read”, as being but one step along the road towards “translating the plates with a blanket stretched across the room...” This latter method was that which was employed in “translating” the *Book of Mormon*.

In May 1943, following the advice of Datus Smith—the editor at Princeton University Press—Brodie accepted a Knopf fellowship, which was to help her complete the biography. The stipend was in the order of \$2,500. Quite a coup for a writer whose literary claim to fame were two small wartime pamphlets: *Our Far Eastern Record* and *Peace Aims and Post-War Planning: A Bibliography*. She was now also a mother, having given birth to Richard McKay Brodie in November of 1942.

The public announcement of the fellowship, meant that her project was now openly

discussed in Mormon circles. Previously, her discussion of the book had taken place between family members. Members, it must be said, many of whom were leading authorities in the Latter Day Saints church. She wrote to her parents, apprising them of the fellowship, and asked that they “not...advertise [it] to anyone....” She was concerned that criticism of her would be deflected on to criticism of her parents, who were still staunch members of the Church. “You will probably be criticized for having raised a wayward daughter,” she said to them in the letter, suggesting that they respond to this attack in the following way: “Well, I don’t know what the girl is up to. It’s all her own doing you know, and she’s always been inclined to be a little headstrong.” A fatal response for a Mormon, if there ever was one. Brodie concluded her letter by thanking her parents for bringing her up to “revere the truth, which is the noblest ideal a parent can instil in his children. The fact that we come out on somewhat different roads is certainly no reflection on you.”

Brodie was sensitive to the position that her biography would place her parents in; particularly her father. In 1941 he had been elevated to the position of an assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, the Church’s chief governing body. Media attention was not long in coming. Following the press release of Alfred A. Knopf, she was besieged by journalists, and there were rumblings of criticism heard from the church’s press in Utah. In one article, she was reported to have said that she had “found that Mormon historians had so deified their prophet that they had robbed him of the healthy, earthy qualities which endeared him to his people. The old anti-Mormon diatribes, on the other hand, gave Satan the credit for his success. Both biases blinded their authors to one of the most exciting and fabulous success stories in American history.”

The church’s hierarchy found that any media report was bad news. They had suffered much over the years from a press—ever in search of controversy to sell copies—which was indifferent to the consequences of their actions; and the latest reportage from these journalists, who had little understanding of the theology or history of the Mormon Church, boded ill for what was to come. Here was a representative of a bizarre sect being given a prestigious fellowship to write a biography of the most controversial man in American religious and political history.

Wherever she went, she was dogged by controversy; a controversy which was gleefully exaggerated and reported on as fact in the organs of the secular press.

With the assistance of the fellowship money, she travelled to conduct research in the Library of Congress, which was then close to her home; and then she went up to the New York Public Library, which contained a cache of press clippings on the Mormons when they were in Missouri and Illinois. She then moved on to the New York State Library in Albany, which held many newspapers from the foundation of the United States in 1776. Here she learned of the Moundbuilder Indians, and the original writings of those that formed the theory that they were descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel. From there, she followed the Mormon trail, visiting libraries and newspaper offices, in search of material that would inform her research. Her visit to the Kirtland courthouses, yielded records of the many hours and days that Joseph Smith spent defending the numerous charges that had been brought against him. In the summer of 1943, she arrived in Salt Lake City, and discussed the substance of her research with her parents, and advised them that she “would not submit it [the biography] for Church censorship.” She offered to publish the work under a pseudonym, if it would save her father from embarrassment. But in the event, he sternly said: “Absolutely not.” Anyway, such was her fame, that nobody would believe that she wasn’t the author of the work, when it was finally published.

She visited the Church’s archives and libraries, where much of the most sensitive material on the Mormon church is held. Naturally, access to these materials are restricted to those who are high in the Mormon hierarchy. Initially she spent a considerable amount of time ploughing through copies of *The Wasp* and the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, which she found to be information-rich on the Mormon presence in Nauvoo. She then started requesting access to innocuous manuscript material in the libraries. But there came the day when she requested access to the manuscript of Joseph Smith’s 93-page diary. Church historian, William Lund, nearly had a heart attack—perhaps the precursor to the one that later carried him off into eternity. After returning from his doctor, he crisply informed her that only Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith was in a position to give her the permission she needed.

She wrote an official request for the permission that she sought, and deposited the request

on Lund's desk, who blanched at the prospect of forwarding it on to Smith. Just to make sure, she also wrote to Smith himself, requesting an interview with him. When the interview actually took place, it was in Smith's office on Temple Square, which was a place where few women had been. Brodie described the meeting as cool. But really, that was when the interview began. As it continued, it got progressively cooler, until at last it was frigid. Referring to the library, Smith said that "[t]here are things in this library we don't let anyone see." Asked for the reason why the polygamy revelation had not been published, Smith replied that the "revelation on polygamy came as early as 1831 but has never been printed because it would be misinterpreted by the bulk of the church members." From Brodie's account of the interview, she was candid in expressing her aims, and impressed upon Smith her desire that she "was trying to write scholarly and accurate history, to avoid sensationalizing and fictionalizing of any sort."

After the interview, her uncle, David Oman McKay "came storming up" to her parents home, and attacked her for showing disrespect for the aged Smith; accusing her of being intent on destroying the Mormon Church, and almost accused her of being an apostate. He refused to listen to what she had to say about her project, and stormed off in the manner in which he had arrived, forbidding her to return to the library, "since he wasn't going to permit anyone to use the library who would distort the truth." Apparently, he later cooled down and had second thoughts about the matter, sending her a note giving permission to full access to the library. Brodie rejected the permission for reasons she never explained, and spent the remainder of her time in Utah at the University of Utah and the Utah Historical Society libraries.

Leaving Utah, Brodie journeyed to Independence in Missouri. Independence was the nineteenth-century jumping-off point for the conquest of the West, as it was for the Mormon wagon trains making their respective ways to the new Jerusalem: Salt Lake City. She spent almost two weeks at the library of the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Her reception there couldn't have been more stark to the one she was accorded in Utah. Writing of her time in the library, she said: "I saw a good many original letters, the photostatic copy of the *Book of Mormon* manuscript, the original manuscript for the *Inspired Translation of the Bible*, the Hyrum Page seer stone, several of Joseph Smith's own books, and a good deal of

printed material.” She also had an opportunity to meet the leaders of the Reorganised Church. Of this meeting, she wrote: “After conversing with Frederick and Israel [Smith],...I felt that neither deifies his grandfather to nearly the extent that the average Utah Mormon does. They are inclined to be a little apologetic, and they are definitely on the defensive.”

In one of those fortuitous accidents, Brodie came into contact with and subsequently hired a research assistant named Dale L. Morgan. Like her, he was a graduate of the University of Utah, and had gone on to establish himself as a respected scholar, with a deep and abiding fascination with western history. His reputation rested on two major works, *Utah: A Guide to the State* and *Humboldt: Highroad of the West*. And he had done all this while suffering a major physical impediment: He was deaf, the result of the meningitis which he had contracted at the age of fourteen.

Although he was already an established author, the fact that Brodie was easy to get along with, and the fact that they both shared the same fascination with Mormon history, he settled down to taking the back seat: suggesting sources of information; critiquing the preliminary drafts of Brodie’s manuscript; and undertaking an extensive analysis of the text. In his first report to her, he pointed out faults which were all too apparent to him: that she had not developed her critique of Joseph Smith’s early years, and still needed to fill in important gaps in this aspect of his life. And in other places, she had gone beyond what the evidence warranted: “Your own point of view, as set forth in this manuscript, is much too hard and fast, to my way of thinking, it is too coldly logical in its conception of Joseph’s mind and the development of his character. Your view of him is all hard edges, without any of those blurrings which are more difficult to cope with but which constitutes a man in the round,” and went on to make following pointed criticism: “I am particularly struck with the assumption your manuscript makes that Joseph was a self-conscious imposter.”

Mormon critics of *No Man Knows My History* have attacked her work because it is not thorough enough about Smith’s early life, and that she started off with the assumption, as Morgan said, that Joseph Smith was a “self-conscious imposter”. This, they say, is the result of having a Jewish husband, rather than the consequences of having access to too much damning evidence.

Morgan himself admitted in his analysis of Brodie's manuscript, that he had not made any "final judgements" about Joseph Smith. Saying that "Regardless of how he got started with the Mormon affair, he came to believe absolutely in what he was doing; his sincerity can hardly be challenged. I think he had an extreme capacity for fantasy, and...[came] to the point that it displaced reality." Many of the early chapters of the manuscript, as it then existed, rested, according to Morgan, on Eber D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*, which was published in 1834. The book was the earliest and most powerful exposé of early Mormonism. According to Morgan, Brodie used aspects of Howe's critique, which was based on classical Mormon thought patterns of logic, which Brodie extended to use in the early chapters of her manuscript. A lot of this reasoning is based on a massive number of "ifs". Ultimately, "the probability of error increases as the chain of reasoning lengthens", said Morgan.

Recognising the truth of Morgan's criticism, Brodie extensively revised the first ten chapters, and then went to work on telling the story of Joseph Smith's experiences in Ohio and Missouri, where he was imprisoned and finally expelled from the State following frenzied mob activity. It was about this time that Brodie became aware of the work of Vesta Crawford. She was a practicing Mormon who was a poet and writer, and was editorial secretary and an associate to the Mormon Church's *Relief Society Magazine*. She had done considerable research on Joseph Smith's first wife, Emma—the forgotten woman of Mormon history—, and willingly shared the result of her researches with Brodie, of which the most fascinating discovery was that before Smith's death, he was reputed to have or had thirty-four wives—though the indefatigable ex-Mormon couple of Jerald and Sandra Tanner have raised that number to 84 in their 1969 book, *Joseph Smith and Polygamy*. Emma Smith is the most forgotten, because she sided with the "rebellion" against the authority of Brigham Young, in his assumption of the Presidency of the Church after the murder of Joseph Smith, and his decision to move beyond the western pale, to the new territory of Utah. She became the focal point of the Reorganised Latter Day Saints Church.

In addition to Crawford, Brodie came across Claire Noall, who was more interested in the philosophical reasoning behind the polygamy which was practiced in Nauvoo. In her own

research Noall had examined the costs and benefits that accrued to both sexes, as it related to the practice of polygamy. The reasons and motivations were totally different for either sex. But what she found was that there was considerable enthusiasm *for* the practice from both sides of the sexual divide. For the men, it was “ridiculously easy to transform relative promiscuity into a religious duty”. And for the women: Noall admitted that she had found it difficult to accept the genuineness of the “magnetism of plural marriage for the women”. She said, that from the research that she had carried out, the type of polygamy that was practiced in Nauvoo was little more than “disguised whoredom”. “After all,” she wrote, “the difference between fornication and sacred matrimony is merely a few mumblings from any mangy justice of the peace. The word is the thing, after all. Most of the polygamous women were very certain that it was a commandment of God.”

It was through the writings of another Mormon writer, Juanita Brooks, that Brodie came across another controversial aspect of Mormon history: the Mountain Meadows Massacre. In 1857, a group of a hundred non-Mormon immigrants were making their way westwards through southern Utah. All one hundred were murdered by a group of Mormons, aided by local Indians. While there was some investigation of the massacre at the time, it wasn't until recent decades that the events surrounding the massacre have taken on added significance, as new documents have come to light, that have linked the Church's involvement with the cover-up, when Federal authorities became involved.

In Appendix B of *No Man Knows My History*, Brodie deals with the Spaulding-Rigdon theory concerning the writing of the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants* and the *Pearl of Great Price*. Many who have come across Mormon elders, will have been informed in no uncertain terms that Joseph Smith was an uneducated man, and was incapable of writing the *Book of Mormon*; therefore, the authorship of the book must have been the result of Divine fiat. But it must also be said that most, if not all, Mormon elders on the evangelical trail, have no knowledge of the early history of the Church on which behalf they are engaged in expanding its domain. And if they have any knowledge of the Church's history, it is a carefully sanitised version.

The authorship of the book has always been a bone of contention, both from the Mormon perspective, and from those espousing Protestant Christianity. If the *Book of Mormon* wasn't the work of Divine inspiration, then it was the work of men. Only two theories have emerged to account for the latter version: Joseph Smith dictated the book to an associate; or what has become known as the Spaulding theory.

According to the proponents of the Spaulding-Rigdon theory, it was Solomon Spaulding who wrote the original version of the *Book of Mormon*, and this he originally titled *Manuscript Found*. Spaulding had written the work to earn enough money to pay off the numerous debts that he was encumbered with. It was a purely pecuniary reason. According the popular version of the story, Spaulding had taken the manuscript to the Grandin's printshop—which was eventually to print the first edition of the *Book of Mormon*—for the manuscript to be evaluated for commercial potential, and with the view to it being published. While it was there, the manuscript was stolen, and the person who came under suspicion was one, Sidney Rigdon, who played an undeniably important role in the foundation of the Mormon Church, prior to the death of Joseph Smith, and its transplanting to Utah.

There are a number of problems with the theory. But it is important to notice that the theory was accepted as being the true account of the book's composition, by all sorts of people. Brodie goes into this in elaborate detail, untangling all of the confusion that surrounds the theory, and delivered the death-blow by proving that Rigdon had no contact with Joseph Smith until late in 1830; and that prior to that, he was a constant companion of the leading lights of the Restoration Movement—including both Thomas and Alexander Campbell as well as Walter Scott. It is possible, that many of the striking mutually held beliefs of both groups may have been transmitted to Smith via Rigdon, but this influence was exerted after he became a Mormon in November 1830, long after the *Book of Mormon* was published—which was in March of 1830.

The Spaulding theory came to public notice in 1833, four years after the *Book of Mormon* was completed, and three after it was first published. The author of the theory was Philastus Hurlbut, who had been excommunicated from the Mormon Church in June of that year. Spaulding, who died in 1816, lived most of his life, after graduating from Dartmouth College,

in Ohio and Pennsylvania, and so Hurlbut reasoned that Rigdon and Joseph Smith must have come into contact at some stage, prior to the publication of the *Book of Mormon*. Also, after being excommunicated, Hurlbut heard that some of the former parishioners of Spaulding had found some striking similarities between Spaulding's work and the text of the *Book of Mormon*. He decided that he would look further into the matter, and obtained affidavits from John Spaulding (Solomon Spaulding's brother), Martha Spaulding (his wife), Henry Lake, John Miller, Aaron Wright, Oliver Smith, Nahum Howard, and Artemus Cunningham (unsworn and unsigned, in the case of the latter, though). The affidavits were written by Hurlbut, though he must have arranged for a justice of the peace to formally take the oaths. Brodie notes that "although five out of the eight had heard Spaulding's story only once, there was a surprising uniformity in the details they remembered after twenty-two years. Six recalled the names of Nephi, Lamanite, etc.; six held that the manuscript described the Indians as descendants of the lost ten tribes; four mentioned that the great wars which caused the erection of the Indian mounds; and four noted the ancient scriptural style."

Hurlbut visited Martha Spaulding a second time, offering her half of the profits from the sales of the book, in exchange for permission to publish the manuscript—expecting that the similarity between the two texts would mortally damage the credibility of the *Book of Mormon*. She replied that "Spaulding had a great variety of manuscripts", one of which was "Manuscript Found". She gave him permission to examine Spaulding's papers, but he found only one manuscript, "Manuscript Story", which was about 45,000 words in length—which could remotely be considered as being the foundation for reworking into the *Book of Mormon*. Not long enough for the *Book of Mormon*, and it told the story of some Romans who were blown onto the shores of America during a fierce storm. She said that Spaulding had taken "Manuscript Found" to the publishing house of Patterson and Lambdin.

Undaunted, Hurlbut showed the manuscript to Spaulding's former neighbours who recognised it, but noted that it wasn't the "Manuscript Found" that they had in mind. In the process, Hurlbut acquired a collaborator in the person of Eber D. Howe. Howe wrote to Robert Patterson, now the principal of the publishing partnership of Patterson and Lambdin, asking

whether he could recall having seen a manuscript from Solomon Spaulding. Patterson wrote back “no” to the question of having seen the manuscript, and pointed out, that at the time in question, he was not involved in the printing side of the business. The deathblow to his researches, came with the discovery that the partnership wasn’t formed until 1818, two years after Spaulding’s death.

After having invested an immense amount of time and money on trying to prove a hunch, Hurlbut found that all he could do was to insinuate that Sidney Rigdon had stolen the manuscript from Spaulding; and that both he and Joseph Smith had set about editing and rewriting the book to mould it into the *Book of Mormon*.

Howe purchased Hurlbut’s affidavits for five hundred dollars, and they were incorporated into his book, *Mormonism Unveiled*. The Mormons challenged Howe to produce the manuscript of “Manuscript Found”, but the fabled manuscript had disappeared after the publication of Howe’s book. The 45,000 word “Manuscript Story” was lost for a quarter of a century before resurfacing in 1883 in Hawaii, and was eventually published by the Reorganised Church in 1885, as *The Manuscript Found or the Manuscript Story of the Late Rev. Solomon Spaulding*.

The early critics of the *Book of Mormon*, spent more than half a century on the Rigdon-Spaulding theory, before finally giving up in frustration. Along the way, Patterson and Lambdin somehow got converted in some accounts to Grandin’s, the publisher and printer of the *Wayne Sentinel* and the eventual printer of the *Book of Mormon*.

By November 1943, Brodie was already getting worried about the length of the book. Writing to Morgan, she said that she “must stop trying to write the history of the church, and start writing a biography.” But as the history of the Mormon church is bound up intricately with the central character of the biography—Joseph Smith—she couldn’t avoid recycling the history of the Mormon church. In January 1944, she suffered a miscarriage which left her bedridden for more than a month. This interrupted the work on the biography at a time when Knopf was getting restive about the kind of biography they were going to get from Brodie.

Returning to the typewriter in March, she was finally able to announce on April the first, that “I have finally succeeded in putting five bullets in the prophet.” By this, she meant that she

had completed the assassination of Joseph Smith, and that most of the writing had been completed. But her revelry was short-lived, as news came through that her father had suffered a major heart attack, and death was expected at any time. She put everything on hold while she dragged her two-year-old son, Richard, across to Salt Lake City, expecting that she would never speak to her father again. When she arrived at his bedside, she found a man who was anticipating his next round of golf and was also preparing to resume his church duties as an assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve.

She returned home to begin the onerous task of revision and correcting errors she discovered that she had made. She made one last effort to find evidence that Joseph Smith had fathered children by his other wives, other than Emma. It was the Reorganised Church's claim that Smith never practiced polygamy, and that the cloud of women were just hangers-on. This was strange, given his insistence on moral uprightness in the presence of women.

She completed the biography in August and forwarded it on to Morgan for evaluation and critical analysis. This came after a brief interval—Morgan having put aside his own projects. Having praised the manuscript and finding that Brodie was master of her material, he did find a number of faults which he had referred to previously in their correspondence. For example, the Nauvoo period needed more work; Smith's character is stained by "a certain tentativeness" and that she had failed to adequately explain why his followers were drawn to him; and he referred again to his criticisms of her relying too much on Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*, to frame her assumptions; and urged her to add a final chapter to analyse the character of Joseph Smith. He felt that comprehending Smith's "character in all its final complexity is essential to the reader's understanding of the final events of his life."

Brodie returned to her typewriter with renewed vitality, and began attacking those parts that Morgan had referred to. She also sent a copy of the manuscript off to Brigham Young University Professor Wilford Poulson for comment. Not believing the media hype, he suggested that the work could not be characterised as being "definitive". And after dismissing her efforts, he ventured to suggest what he believed a definitive biography of Joseph Smith would be like: "I believe the future great biography of the Prophet Joseph Smith will not ungenerously trim him

down to the proportions of a liar, an impostor, an adulterer, and anything else mostly bad.” And this is the crux of the matter: If he wasn’t a prophet, he *was* a liar, an impostor, and an extraordinary adulterer; and in addition to these faults, he was a swindler, extortioner, thief, false prophet, false teacher, and so on. And these are the personal characteristics that stand out in the history of Joseph Smith. No matter how revisionist historians from the Latter Day Saints church wish to manipulate the facts, it is these features of Smith’s life that stand out. While he may have had some positive qualities, the negatives always outweigh the positives. The reason why none of the LDS establishment historians were willing to write what they considered a proper biography of Joseph Smith was because they clearly had the impression, that if they did any original research, the moral character of Smith could only degenerate further with greater exposure.

Brodie sent off the revised manuscript to Knopf in October of 1944, where a final revision was carried out, with a bevy of scholars poring over the text of the manuscript, while Brodie retired to choose the photographs that would appear in the finished book. Among those she suggested, was the newly discovered image of Oliver Buell, who was the son of Presendia Huntington Buell, one of Smith’s plural wives. The image shows a young man that bares a striking likeness to Joseph Smith. Brodie believed that she now had the final piece of evidence that was to nail the question of adultery once and for all. She inspected the galley proofs in August the following year, and three months later the book was finally printed, and was accorded a blistering condemnation—after an initial silence—from the Mormon press and acclaim from historians, scholars and the press outside of Utah. It was not noted by the non-Mormon press in the state of Utah, perhaps fearing a backlash from members of the Mormon church.

About the only mention in the Utah press, came from the *Ogden Standard-Examiner* which gave the book a favourable review, saying: “The book commands immediate attention. Nibble at the first paragraph and you are lost, lured speedily through the work by her fascinating story.” For the rest of the state, there was silence. A silence which was only broken about half a year later, when the *Deseret News* mentioned its existence: saying that the editorial board had received many requests for the newspaper’s appraisal of *No Man Knows My History*. The

editorial justified the paper's silence on the basis that it had received no copy of the book to review. But it was the attack from Apostle John Widtsoe, which was published in the March 1946 issue of *Improvement Era*, that opened the flood-gates. He said that the book "will be of no interest to Latter-day Saints who have a correct knowledge of the history of Joseph Smith." But as most Mormons had no knowledge of the history of Joseph Smith, much less a knowledge of the "correct" version of his history, it was little wonder that the book sold well in Utah. Any history is better than no history at all.

The author was attacked at the annual general conference by no lesser figure than President George Albert Smith. The speech was followed later by a stirring rejoinder from Apostle Albert Bowen. A couple of months later, it was same Bowen that penned a poisonous attack on Brodie, which was published in the Church News section of the *Deseret News*. In the article, Bowen attacked Brodie as being an atheist, and the book as being an expression of her atheism. He also alluded to the fact that her husband was Jewish, and that his Jewishness was responsible for the book's lack of objectivity. "It is easy to grant the author the merit of a fine literary style throughout which makes the book altogether enticing reading. It is the style of the novelist and not of the historian." The article, which apparently mirrored the sentiments of the General Authorities, was later issued to missionaries as a tract, now titled *The Appraisal of the So-Called Brodie Book*.

Shortly after Bowen's *Deseret News* article, Hugh Nibley issued his famous booklet, *No Ma'am, That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose*, which has since become something a Mormon classic; its sales spiralling ever upwards, as Nibley rose to greater heights in the faculty of Brigham Young University. The booklet was supposed to be an attack on Brodie's book; instead, it has in recent years become something of an embarrassment, as it is really an attack on Brodie herself—a fact which is even acknowledged by both the membership and leadership of the Mormon church.

However, it was the brooding storm that was brewing in her own family, that was to see her finally excommunicated from the church. Several members of the family attacked her publicly in ward meetings, while David O. McKay initially issued a resolution for the Council

of Twelve. But the matter was allowed to lie, as it would “make a martyr out of her”. However, after the 1946 general conference Brodie was formally excommunicated from the church. After charging her with apostasy, the local church authorities said: “You assert matters as truth which deny the divine origin of the *Book of Mormon*, the restoration of the Priesthood and of Christ’s Church through the instrumentality of the Prophet Joseph Smith, contrary to the beliefs, doctrines, and teachings of the Church.”

As the news of David McKay’s part in the excommunication of Brodie became public knowledge, it created a major division that started to divide the Mormon church. Fawn’s mother issued a statement in which she said “I venture this prediction: This is one excommunication the Church will some day be ashamed of.” But it was McKay’s “colt” story that finally fractured the facade of family unity. Before the student body of Brigham Young University, McKay told the story of Dandy, a colt with a “good disposition, clean well-rounded eyes...well proportioned, and all in all, a choice equine possession....” Unfortunately, Dandy resented restraint, and nibbled at the tie-rope and broke free. He broke through the fence, and got into a neighbour’s paddock where he found a sack of grain. But the grain was laced with poison, being used for rat bait. Dandy ate and died in terrible agony. McKay concluded the parable by saying: “My heart aches this morning because one who was pretty closed to me failed—violated conventions in childhood—later broke through the fence of consideration and decency—found the poison grain of unbelief, and now languishes in spiritual apathy and decay.”

*No Man Knows My History* was dedicated to the memory of Lt. McKeen Eccles Brimhall, a Mormon who had been killed in the last days of the Second World War on French soil. His father, Dean Brimhall, got upset with the parallels being drawn from McKay’s parable and Brodie. After reading the book, he issued a statement that Brodie “had a hero in her book and that hero was *truth*. She has raised our family to new levels of achievement. I know her grandfather, George H. Brimhall, would have been deeply moved with pride by the success of his granddaughter in the field of great creative writing... The Church has made some unhappy history for itself.” To Dean Brimhall, the McKay story was a personal insult, because of the dedication: “He insulted my father and since the book was dedicated to McKeen his slander about Fawn

spread over me. There is no reason for David O. McKay to be protected in such unseemly action—even dishonest words about Fawn’s unconventionality as a child. McKeen died to preserve free criticism. Should I fail now by letting this dishonest attack go unpunished just because D.O. McKay is supposed to be a prophet of God?”

But the response of both Fawn’s father and brother, Thomas Brimhall McKay, is puzzling. Her father supported her, both in conducting research into the history of Joseph Smith and the history of the LDS church, and to write the biography. Now having written the book, he felt that he could not support the book’s contents and her interpretation of Joseph Smith’s history and the early history of LDS church. He refused to discuss the book with his daughter, and even read the book. This fact, Fawn Brodie said, “was an act of real hostility...and his refusal to discuss it, hurt me more, I think, than an angry argument about the contents would have done. At any rate, we both found it impossible to communicate on the subject as on most others.”

Her brother’s response was similar to that of their father’s, and felt that his sister’s excommunication was fully justified. He was willing to carry on an open dialogue with Fawn while the book was being written, and defended her right to write it; but that was it. After it was written, she had cast her lot in with the infidel, and must bare the consequences of her actions. In Mormon theology, excommunication is not complete separation from the church. But after being served with the result of the excommunication hearings, she seems to have lost interest in pursuing the matter. Perhaps she believed that to do so was a useless gesture given her determination not to allow the apologists for the Church’s history to alter it in any way.

Fawn Brodie’s mother was her most passionate defender in Utah. After the death of her husband, she seemed to shift in the nature of the defence she offered to Mormon critics of Fawn. The LDS church, likewise, has not become embarrassed by the excommunication. But it is still deathly afraid of its critical internal historians. They know, as it were, where all the bodies are buried. As the liberal Bible scholar and church historian, Martin E. Marty, has observed about the early history of the LDS church: there “is no place to hide. What can be sequestered in Mormon archives and put beyond the range of historians can often be approached by sources outside them....There is little protection for Mormon sacredness.” As that great survivor, church

historian Michael Quinn, has observed: “In 1835 the *Doctrine and Covenants* began a policy of retroactive editing by reversing previous meanings, adding concepts and whole paragraphs to the texts of previously published revelations. The official alterations of pre-1835 revelations is a more fundamental context for the later pattern of editing in the *History of the Church*.” *The History of the Church* that Quinn refers to, is the series of volumes on church history, the first of which was written by Joseph Smith himself, but has been the subject of numerous revisions, because history has made a liar out of Joseph Smith.

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