in the greater area. The Church has obtained a number of the buildings and sites owned by early members in Nauvoo and has restored or reconstructed them to show what life was like for the Saints in Nauvoo.

Near Nauvoo is the town of Carthage, the county seat for Hancock County. Here Joseph Smith was imprisoned on June 25, 1844, and murdered by a mob on June 27. Nauvoo and Carthage Jail are supervised by the Illinois Peoria Mission and full-time missionaries staff them.

Following the martyrdom, the Saints, under the direction of Brigham Young, left Nauvoo in the winter of 1846, founding a number of temporary settlements en route to the West. Winter Quarters, Nebraska (now Florence, a suburb of Omaha), on the west bank of the Missouri River, and Kanesville, Iowa (now Council Bluffs), on the east bank, were the locations of a large settlement in the fall and winter of 1846-1847, remaining there until 1852. The Winter Quarters cemetery is all that remains of this historical site today.

The Mormon Trail to Utah has a number of monuments and historic sites. Salt Lake City has numerous historical sites. Temple Square with the temple, tabernacle, assembly hall, and visitors center is the most visited site in the Church. Other sites include “This Is the Place” Monument, the Beehive and Lion houses built and occupied by Brigham Young, and the nearby cemetery with his grave.

The Church also maintains three historic sites in St. George, Utah: the Brigham Young winter home, representing the LDS expansion southward along the valleys of the Intermountain West; the St. George Tabernacle, an epitome of the construction of large assembly halls in the major communities settled by Latter-day Saints; and the St. George Temple, the first temple completed in Utah. The temple’s dedication in 1877 demonstrated the commitment of the Latter-day Saints to temple work and to establishing permanent communities in the Intermountain West. It is an important example of LDS architecture of the period. And in nearby Santa Clara stands the home of Jacob Hamblin, one of the earliest missionaries to the Indians in southern Utah.

These and other historic sites serve as reminders of the humble yet extraordinary beginnings of the Church and of the sacrifices made by those individuals who committed their lives to follow its teachings.

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HISTORY, SIGNIFICANCE TO LATTER-DAY SAINTS

History plays a vital role in LDS thought, where it joins with theology and practical religion to answer many of life’s questions and to make daily life meaningful, intelligible, and worthwhile. God is seen as actively achieving his ultimate purposes.
through events that make up history, while simultaneously allowing individuals the choice of working for or against his purposes.

Although Latter-day Saints do not have an officially stated philosophy of history, several basic ideas in LDS theology establish the significance of history.

1. First is the nature of mankind. As God’s literal spirit offspring, humans partake of divine attributes and destiny; they have the potential to attain godhood. On the other hand, humanity is fallen and has become “carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Moses 5:13), with capacities for evil and degradation comparable with those of the devil himself. Hence, there is dramatic interest among Latter-day Saints in the broadest spectrum of human thoughts, words, and deeds.

2. Second is an unequivocally positive commitment to life in this world (see Purpose of Earth Life). In LDS thought, a seamless web of individual being extends back in time to a self-conscious pre-earth life, and forward to the possibility and hope of eternal life in the presence of God. Prior choices and God’s purposes have determined one’s presence and place in this life; and, to a large extent, present choices will determine one’s eternal future. In axioms such as “Men are, that they might have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25), LDS doctrine emphasizes the significance and goodness of the historical experience.

3. Human freedom is required. In order to preserve human agency, God does not break “across the line of history through the instrumentality of unmerited love,” but he participates “in the historical process by inspiring men and co-operating with them in their efforts to improve the world’s conditions” (Boyd, pp. 450, 453). Thus, God “directs and influences” the historical process, but he also respects the “centrality of freedom” for his children, something to which he is committed “partly by his nature and partly by his will” (Poll, pp. 33, 35).

4. History itself is part of eternal truth. “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24; cf. 88:79). Thus, written records (including sacred histories) can encompass only a small portion of eternal reality, and even under optimum circumstances are incomplete and imperfect.

The LDS idea of history has much in common with that of Jews and Christians who believe in the living God—who-acts-in-history. Latter-day Saints view human history as the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation for mankind (Heilsgeschichte), a view that dominated Western civilization until the eighteenth century. They generally agree with the traditional linear concept of history laid down in Augustine’s City of God, although they place the eventual divine society on this earth (in a glorified and eternal physical state), not in an otherworldly dimension.

LDS faith is intertwined with historical events. Latter-day Saints essentially believe the literal biblical account of God’s direct role in the Creation and of the fall of Adam and Eve—the proof of human freedom. A series of gospel dispensations then unfolded. In each dispensation God’s plan for mankind was revealed, only to be rejected eventually by chosen, but backsliding, human beings. The supreme set of events in history is the birth, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This quintessentially Christian philosophy reaches its culmination in a hope, confidence, and preparation for Jesus’ literal second coming, marking the end of this phase of the world’s history. Latter-day Saints believe in a Christ-centered history and find power and reassurance in the fact that Jesus Christ became a real, historic person who endured mortality and its trials (Heb. 4:15–16). They add other elements to the Savior’s historical reality. They believe that the resurrected Jesus appeared among the people of the Book of Mormon, and that God the Father and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith in 1820 to open the last dispensation when the fulness of the gospel will be taught to all of the nations and people.

The foundations of the Church are grounded in a series of historic events, without which the Restoration would be incomprehensible and impotent. Joseph Smith recorded many visions and he received the gold plates from the angel Moroni, from which he translated the Book of Mormon. There followed many revelations to Joseph Smith and to the prophets who have succeeded him, revealing doctrines and applying eternal principles to existing historical and individual situations. That living prophets receive revelation from God, who is vitally interested in human needs in changing conditions, underscores the LDS view of God’s continuing place in history.
That view is that God has played a role throughout ancient and modern history by foreordaining religious, political, scientific, and other leaders (e.g., Cyrus; see Isa. 44:28; Jer. 1:5). The great reformers (Luther, Calvin, Knox), discoverers such as Columbus, and the authors of the Constitution of the United States of America were foreordained to prepare the way for the Restoration and to establish a new nation "conceived in liberty" that, like ancient Israel, was not chosen for special privilege but was to be a blessing to all mankind (Petersen, pp. 69–72; Backman, p. 724). This view was summarized by President Ezra Taft Benson: "God, the Father of us all, uses the men of the earth, especially good men, to accomplish his purposes" (Ensign 2 [July 1972]:59).

God's role in the mundane details of history may be less obvious but more frequent than thought. Elder Bruce R. McConkie declared that the real history of the world "will show God's dealings with men, [and] the place the gospel has played in the rise and fall of nations" (MD, 1958, p. 327). Still, the record is incomplete; many important issues about historical injustices and catastrophes are yet to be explained by the God who acts in history, and what is not yet fully known in the macrocosmic realm is often explained in the meaningful experiences of individual people. God knows and cares about each human being. As with the larger world, God intervenes in individual lives at decisive moments, but also recognizes human autonomy and leaves the majority of life's decisions to individual choice.

God's role in human history should not, however, be taken to the extreme. His foreknowledge does not require predestination. Foreordination means that in his wisdom and foreknowledge God has called an individual to a role in the human drama if that person chooses to fill it. To Latter-day Saints, history is a combination of God's direction (which is neither "coercive [n]or continuous" [Poll, p. 33]) and divine intervention when that is indispensable to his purposes, with broad freedom of choice for humans within God's expansive framework. In this large realm of human freedom, the panorama of history has taken place. Here, political, social, economic, psychological, and other such forces largely hold sway, and thus are essential in explaining human choices and actions.

This historical view became an integral part of early LDS theology, of Joseph Smith's personal mission, of his vision of the Church's mission throughout the world, and of the anticipated second coming of Jesus Christ. All of this may also account in part for the meticulous attention given to record keeping in the Church and by the prophets (see History of the Church, Historians). All members of the Church are encouraged to write personal journals and family histories, and to make them a part of their extended families' sacred possessions.

In recent years the recognition of the Church by historians and sociologists as a distinctive new religion has generated broader interest in the writing and understanding of its history. But the writing of general history, especially religious history, has always had its difficulties. Surviving documents are limited and often inconsistent. Spiritual experiences are often kept private, and primarily lend themselves only to spiritual verification. Memories and lore are selective and fallible. Purposes, needs, audiences, historical fashions, and professional methods change from one decade to the next.

Traditional LDS historians, following their Jewish and early Christian predecessors, have tended to focus heavily on the hand of God in writing about Church and world history. Their histories are generally descriptive and declarative, sympathetic to the historical figures, and written mainly to inspire and build faith. According to William Mulder, "No where in Mormon record-keeping can [one] escape the teleological, the didactic, the eschatological" (p. 17).

This view is countered by other historians, such as Fawn M. Brodie, who explicitly rejected the prophetic truth claims of the LDS faith and interpreted Joseph Smith and the Restoration wholly on the basis of modern naturalistic, historicist, and psychoanalytic methods. Their objective is typically to provide causal explanations by emphasizing the human aspects while rejecting divine involvement.

Most recent LDS historical scholarship represents a wide and changing spectrum. There is, as Henry Bawden advised, room for a number of perspectives and purposes. On the one hand, there is "faithful history," as expressed by Richard L. Bushman and others, in which the historian has a responsibility not only to consider the divine role but also to lead the kind of life that will permit the discernment of God's influence. For others, strictly empirical social-scientific and historicist methods suffice. Most historians of "Mormonism,"
HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

[This entry discusses the history of the Church in the following six periods:

c. 1820–1831, Background, Founding, New York Period

c. 1831–1844, Ohio, Missouri, and Nauvoo Periods

c. 1844–1877, Exodus and Early Utah Periods

c. 1878–1898, Late Pioneer Utah Period

c. 1898–1945, Transitions: Early-Twentieth-Century Period


In addition, several other articles cover the history of the Church in the light of specific historical disciplines or approaches: see Doctrine: Meaning, Source, and History; Economic History; Intellectual History; Legal and Judicial History; Politics: Political History; Social and Cultural History; and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, The.

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C. 1820–1831, BACKGROUND, FOUNDING, NEW YORK PERIOD

[For other articles pertaining to the main events in the first period of Church History, see also First Vision; Moroni, Visitations of; various entries listed under Book of Mormon; articles on the restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood, of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and Organization of the Church, 1830.

Early biographical information can be found in articles on the Smith Family Ancestors, Joseph Smith, Emma Smith, and several other members of the Smith Family, in addition to Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Sidney Rigdon. For a listing of Mormon sites and communities of this period, see New York, Early LDS Sites in.]

The establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began in the 1820s with events that occurred primarily in New York State. The Prophet Joseph Smith received his FIRST VISION in 1820, obtained the GOLD PLATES of the Book of Mormon from the hill Cumorah in 1827, received priesthood authority in 1829, and officially organized the Church on April 6, 1830. By the time the Church left New York for Ohio early in 1831, it was organized and its basic direction was clearly established.

In its formative years, the infant Church learned above all to depend on revelation for direction. Joseph Smith, young and relatively unschooled, did not pretend to work out the doctrines of the new Church by himself. Direct revelations from God led him step by step. Perhaps the most revolutionary idea in the Church is its belief in Christian revelation beyond the Bible. Latter-day Saints have never doubted the inspiration of the Bible; it has been an essential standard from the beginning (see BIBLE: LDS BELIEF IN). Their experience led them to realize, however, that God also spoke to prophets who were not included in that conventional canon of scripture: the Book of Mormon showed them this (2 Ne. 29:10–14), and they heard Joseph Smith speak with the same authority as biblical apostles and prophets. Consequently, Latter-day Saints began to think of revelation in a new way, and the principle of continuing revelation greatly disturbed their fellow Christians, but from the beginning nothing was more basic to the Church.