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# The Journal of American History

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## Exhibition Review

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"From New England to the Great Salt Lake: The Mormon Legacy of Faith." Peabody Essex Museum, East India Square, Salem, MA 01970.

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Temporary exhibition, May 5–Oct. 1, 2000. 40–50 documents, books, paintings, and other artifacts. William T. La Moy, Marjorie Draper Conder, and John Grimes, co-curators.

"From New England to the Great Salt Lake: The Mormon Legacy of Faith," a choice, small exhibition, has been mounted in the Phillips Library of the Peabody Essex Museum, in Salem, Massachusetts, by William T. La Moy, the James Duncan Phillips Librarian of the museum. Noting the imminent opening of a new Mormon temple in suburban Boston nearby, La Moy proposed to display some of the library's treasures: rare first and fourth editions of the Book of Mormon, a Joseph Smith autograph letter telling of persecutions in Missouri ("no man can be so depraved who understands the circumstances fully as to oppose the idea of our seeking redress"), and another letter to a Salem resident recounting Smith's murder by an Illinois mob ("Mr Joseph Smith & his brother Hiram were assassinated in Carthage Jail while awaiting their trial, on the 27 June in cold blood. . . . The mob were heard to say he was innocent and would be clear'd [so] they must assassinate him. Oh Oh!!!").

The Peabody Essex board members, surprised that the library's deep collections included such items, encouraged La Moy to go ahead with the exhibition. Additional local items displayed in the show include a broadside, a pamphlet, and an 1836 Salem newspaper account of a speech by Sidney Rigdon in the Salem Lyceum. This specifically Salem material exemplifies the way Mormon culture permeated New England in the 1830s and 1840s. Most likely a similar local story could be told wherever papers were preserved. A missionary group from the beginning, the Mormons established congregations all over the region, leaving many traces of their activities. The library's fourth edition of the Book of Mormon belonged to Nathaniel H. Felt, a local Mormon leader, who lived in a house now belonging to the museum. The documents also reveal the ambiguities of presenting and receiving the Mormon message. Some begin positively and end as critiques; others seem to be denunciations and end as praise.

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