

Question: Did Brigham Young attempt to suppress and destroy all copies of Lucy Mack Smith's "Biographical Sketches of Joseph

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Question: Did Brigham Young attempt to suppress and destroy all copies of Lucy Mack Smith's *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*?

Editing history of Lucy's biography

Lavina Fielding Anderson recounts the history of Lucy's biography:

“ The project, which began in the winter of 1844-45, ended almost exactly a year later with the creation of two finished manuscripts (in addition to the rough draft). One of the finished manuscripts stayed in Nauvoo with Lucy and eventually came into possession of Orson Pratt, an LDS apostle, who took it with him to England and published it in 1853. It generated considerable controversy; and Brigham Young, twelve years after the fact, ordered the Saints to deliver up their copies to be destroyed. A “corrected” edition was published, but not until 1901-03, first serially by the Improvement Era and then as a compilation. This project was authorized by Young’s third successor, Lorenzo Snow, and implemented by his fourth, who also happened to be Lucy’s grandson, Joseph F. Smith. Meanwhile, the second finished copy had gone to Utah where it now reposes in the Historian’s Office. ^[1] ”

Dan Vogel notes:

“ Once published, Smith’s *Biographical Sketches* was suppressed by Brigham Young, who condemned it as inaccurate, ordered its destruction, and instructed church historians to begin working on a corrected version. Young’s concern centered on Smith’s favorable portrayal of her son William, whom Young disliked (see Bushman 1984, 194, n. 4; Shipps 1985, 91-107). Pratt issued a statement in 1855 claiming that he believed Lucy’s manuscript ‘was written under the inspection of the Prophet [Joseph Smith]; but from evidences since received, it is believed that the greater part of the manuscripts did not pass under his review, as there are items which are ascertained to be incorrect’ (*Deseret News* 5 [21 March 1855]: 16) ^[2] ”

Brigham Young did attempt to destroy all copies of Lucy Mack Smith's *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*, but we do not have enough information to know the reason why

Critics assume, in the absence of information, that it was because there was information which would embarrass the Church.

Brigham Young began to complain about errors in Lucy's history almost as soon as it was published in 1855. He assigned George A. Smith and Elias Smith to begin working on corrections in 1856; Elias was still working on them in 1866. It was published by President Joseph F. Smith in 1902, based on the corrections by GAS and Elias Smith. It is not known exactly what the changes were that were made, nor do we know the relationship of the 1954 edition mentioned in the letter to the original or to the 1902 version (Preston Nibley edited a version, but we are not sure if it is the one mentioned or not). Orson Pratt himself pointed out that he had erred in suggesting the manuscript had been completed prior to the death of Joseph Smith.

Brigham's response was unusual, both for being out of all proportion to the actual errors that existed and for coming principally more than a decade later. Anderson suggests that his reaction had much more to do with the rift between Pratt and Young than with the contents of history itself.

Anderson also notes that,

“ [The main differences between Lucy's 1844-45 rough draft and Pratt's 1853 publication are omissions and additions. About 10

The main differences between Lucy's 1844-45 rough draft and Pratt's 1850 publication are omissions and additions...About 10 percent of Lucy's original material was omitted, much of it personal family references and Lucy's original preface." [3]

The revisions were apparently made to transform Lucy's history from a personal family history and center it more on Joseph Smith, Jr. and the Church. There were several main changes between Lucy's rough draft and the version published by Orson Pratt.

1. Lucy's preface, in which she introduces herself, was omitted.
2. The story of Lucy's father, Solomon Mack was omitted.
3. The story of Lucy's illness in 1802-1803 was revised.
4. Lucy's reference to folk magic was omitted in Orson Pratt's version. Lucy originally stated "... Let not my reader suppose that because I shall pursue another topic for a season that we stopt our labor and went <at> trying to win the faculty of Abrac drawing Magic circles or sooth saying to the neglect of all kinds of buisness [sic]."

Main articles: ["Magick" and the Smith family](#) and [Lucy Mack Smith on "faculty of Abrac" and "magic circles"](#)

Notes

1. ↑ Lavina Fielding Anderson (ed.), [Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir](#) on Signature Books website.
2. ↑ Dan Vogel, "Lucy Smith history, 1845," (editorial note), *Early Mormon Documents* 1:227.
3. ↑ Lavina Fielding Anderson (ed.), [Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir](#) on Signature Books website.

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