

Salamander Letters
By Steve Mayfield and George Throckmorton
2006 FAIR Conference

Steve Mayfield: Over the years, George and I have had interesting conversations about the Mark Hoffman case and others that we have – we like to quote movies, statements out of movies and our favorite one that relates to Hoffman, and what I see is leads out in a myth making over the Hoffman cases.

A statement made at the end of a movie called "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" starring John Wayne and Jimmy Stewart. For those who don't remember this movie, it starts with Jimmy Stewart and his wife returning to a little town in the west called Shinbone. He's been a US Senator and been an ambassador and he is returning with his wife to this little town to bury an old friend named Tom Doniphon played by John Wayne. And as they come into town the local reporter sees him and then grabs the editor and they come over and say what is this great statesmen, this senator doing at our little town Shinbone and they said we are here to bury a friend.

And the editor pushed the issue we need to talk to you who is this Tom Doniphon. So Jimmy Stewart agrees to talk with them and be interviewed. And he relates the story about as a young lawyer he came to town, he got involved in the local politics and came into conflict with a local outlaw name Liberty Valance. And during the conflict over becoming a state from a territory, he is challenged to a dual by Liberty Valance.

At the same time he is in competition with John Wayne over the girl. After the election for delegates he meets Liberty Valance on the street and shoots and kills him. He now becomes a hero and is known as the man who shot Liberty Valance. They go to the territorial convention and he decides to leave when he accused to being a murderer. And as he is about to leave John Wayne pulls him aside and explains to him that you did not shoot Liberty Valance because during that shooting I was in the alley and I shot and killed him, not you, and they reenact that scene.

He then proceeds to go back in, becomes the delegate, they get statehood and he becomes governor and wins the girl. While after he's explained this whole story that reporters writing all the notes, the editor takes these notes, tears them up and throws them in the fire. He asks but Mr. Editor why did you do that? He got up, turned and looked at Jimmy Stewart and said this is the west sir, when the legend becomes fact, print the legend. This fits in perfect for Mark Hoffman.

Let me share quickly some of the examples I believe exist and some of these are kind of fun, some of these we've all heard. First one is our friend Ed Decker from "Saints Alive in Jesus". This is on his webpage. He has a book called "Bearing the Testimony of Truth" compiled and edited by Derick S. Hartshorn. This been all there for a few years and this morning still was. This is a personal manuscript written by this gentlemen. There are some editorial notes that Decker wrote at the beginning.

“This manuscript was completed and submitted during the brief time that the Mormon church had accepted as true a fraudulent were generally called the white Salamander Letter by infamous forger of Mormon manuscripts Mark Hoffman” so we are talking about 1984. “We have notified the author that this needs to be cleaned up and removed from the book and we’ll make the correction as soon as we receive the corrected copy.” Okay.

“It still is interesting that the LDS church created new doctrine to explain that a white salamander was really an angel and when the hoax was revealed just as suddenly undid the doctrine all without an apologia or a blush.” Wow. I find that kind of humorous that we had a doctrine and such, I must have missed that meeting.

Next one is an article out of the Salt Lake City Weekly from March of 2003 and it's a story about Jerald and Sandra Tanner and Utah Light House ministry. “While many were taken by the notorious document forger and bomber Mark Hoffman Jerald with typical uncompromising accuracy was not bamboozled. Collectors of historical documents from the LDS church to the Library of Congress and some of these were buying Hoffman documents as fast as he could manufacture them. Hoffman sold forged letters, famous Americana and his major focus was forging early Mormon historical documents that were extremely damaging to LDS doctrine and early church leaders. All the while only Jerald Tanner remained unimpressed and unconvinced of the authenticity.”

Now we are talking about all these documents and in the 1984 publicly announced misgivings calling Hoffman a forger. 1984 this is a year before the homicides. I wondered about this now it's pretty clear that Jerald and Sandra had some serious doubts and problems with the Salamander letter but not all of them. So not too long after this article came out I visited with Sandra Tanner at their home and their bookstore and I asked him is this a misprint, is this a misunderstanding by the Weekly.

And this is what Sandra told me. “No, no Jerald did have doubts about all the documents and he really believed that Mark was a forger but he had no solid proof.” Okay. this is 18 years after the fact now this is being revealed in this article but I have some serious problems with that in the fact that in some of the writings of the Tanners following the homicides, making a side note here because they made reference to the bombing forgeries of Hoffman, one thing that has amazed me over the years if you referred to Hoffman as a bomber or the bomber forger. We seem to be afraid to say what he is, he is a murderer. The forgeries and the bombings are secondary to the fact he killed two people. So if I had my preference we'd call what he is, a murderer.

But anyway I asked Sandra that and she just said no he just didn't have any proof. Following the homicides and some of the writings they suggested that Mark wasn't that good of a forger or writer that he must have had help and they suggested that there was another individual who was forging the documents and Mark was the middle man and when this person either died or stopped doing the forgeries, Mark started doing his own and that's when he came in sloppy and so forth. Even as of last October at a conference sponsored by an organization that George belongs the Southwest association of forensic

documents examiner Sandra and Jerald were there and she was even asking people who were there if they had any ideas of anybody who's helping Mark. So I am getting two different stories here but the significance of this is a fact that you read a lot of web pages and some of the chat rooms and they always say that "Jerald was the only one that knew that Mark was a forger, and everybody else believed him. That isn't true at all. There were others had doubts too but I find that is one of the myths that have started.

Another one the myths that is read about is the idea of that there was going to be no trial Mark Hoffman because the church did not want information passed out and the fact that the leadership of the church, whoever "they", are forced a plea bargain. The man that will be proceeding me here, Mr. Throckmorton, has explained to me that on the day he was asked to leave employment from the Salt Lake county DA's, the investigators following the case he was there when district attorney Yokum instructed Bob stop the lead investigator, the lead prosecutor, that he will plea bargain the case. I've also heard from the mouths of Jerry Dalia and a few others people involved with the case that the church had nothing to do with the plea bargain, this came strictly from Mr. Yoakum and yet this is another story that you will read on web pages and chat rooms that the church forced the plea bargains, because they didn't want President Hinckley or any other General Authority to testify.

Now another fun one that I found was interesting. This is the infamous Solomon Spaulding-Sidney Rigdon land deed document that Mark came across. Actually it's a legitimate old land deed where a gentleman Amos Spaulding is selling some land to his wife's cousin Jesse York. Well, Mark somehow got a hold of it, where and when we don't know, but he proceeded to make some changes. Here you see down at the bottom the name Solomon Spaulding, over here you see the name Sidney Rigdon.

Now this is an interesting document because for years, claim was that they didn't really know each other, and here would be some proof that they knew each other. But it turns out these were added names, as you see over here on the date it says 1822. Well, the actual date is 1792. Mark added the date at the top as 1822. This was the document that he showed Elder Hugh Pinnock who then went to sign for the \$186,000 loan to possibly purchase the McLellin Collection. In fact, Mark claimed this was part of McLellin Collection.

A few weeks after showing this to Elder Pinnock, he decided he need some quick cash, so he took it down to Cosmic Aeroplane and sold it for \$400. Even though the guy who bought it, Steve Barnett, said there is a problem with the dates because Spaulding died in 1816. If you went to the original dates 1792 Sidney Rigdon hadn't been born by then. But Mark convinced him saying "that's not the same Solomon Spaulding but will you buy it for the Rigdon autography?" Which he paid him \$400 for.

Now, a few years ago, a book came called "Mormon Conspiracy" by a Charles Wood, I bought this at Utah Lighthouse Ministries, this is what he writes in here. The First Presidency was so impressed with Hoffman's discovery the Anthon transcript that they

called the press conference in which they announced the new discovery and commended Hoffman for his efforts.

Hoffman followed the Anthon transcript in several non faith promoting forged documents which were quickly bought up by the First Presidency and were hidden from the membership and the public. One of these forged documents included a document which linked Sidney Rigdon, second in command to Joseph Smith, to Solomon Spaulding.” This document here.

Now in 2002 when I was reading this book, I had to read it number of times. I had to wash my eyes I have to make sure I was actually reading it correctly because at the particular time I was reading it, this document that you see in front of you, was sitting on my table in my apartment, because I owned it. The church never owned at the time. Because it went from Cosmic Aeroplane, and was used and examined by George and part of the investigation and then was returned to Cosmic Aeroplane at which time the owner, Bruce Robert, sold it to Ken Sanders in 2000 and I bought it from Ken Sanders in August of 2000. Right now in October of 2004, I donated to BYU so it's preserved down there.

But here is a myth that this man saying the church bought it to hide it, but the church never owned it till 2004. I again ask Sandra Tanner, in fact it was funny because not too long after that I was on an airplane to Pasadena to speak at Sunstone symposium and happen to go on the same flight with Jerald and Sandra Tanner, and sat next to him on the plane. And so I asked him about this, since I bought the book from there, I mentioned “well you know there is an error in the book.” Sandra says “oh really?” I showed her “this is wrong” “Well, how is that?” I said “You know who owns that document?” Sandra says “who?” I said “me.” And there was that long pause between her and Jerald looking at me and she quickly recovered and said “you know, there is so much information out there he could have been mistaken or got bad information.” Now think about it. That is a very true statement. And over the 21 years now that has been exactly the problem we've had with this case. We have this idea that the church was buying these documents to hide them and yet a book here by Dean Jessie The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith published in 1984, has six of those documents listed in here. But the majority of those documents that Mark forged were not controversial, were not testimony shaking they were simple little things. There was no reason to hide them, no reason to have pressed them. Yet today, you can read on some web pages, of those who have these great theories of the church was buying these things to hide them, spending millions of dollars so that none of them would ever see light of day.

Now, I am thinking okay. All these other document being bought by the church and other collectors, very publicized in a lot of cases, we don't have two that could be questioned as having been hidden. One being the Josiah Stowell letter and the other one was the letter from Bullock to Brigham Young in reference to the Joseph Smith blessing. You explanations on why these things were not immediately released. But now we have people talking about the church hiding these things and I am saying well if the church is as evil and as satanic as you make it, why would the church buy documents at high prices

just to hide them? That's why man invented matches and paper shredders, yet they are kept. Why is that?

I mean, give them credit. If we are going to be sinister, let's go all the way. But we still have them. In fact, Sandra had a symposium in 2002 on it and they had found another document in our church archives and realized it come from Hoffman. These things are still out there. So it's again a myth that has just taken a life of itself. Let me give you some pointers what to do when you hear various claims.

First of all consider the source. Considering the source of the person writing these things. Number two realize that during this whole time a lot of people were getting information about these documents, but the person that were getting it was from Mark and Mark was very good at lying and telling stories. And just because you may have two persons who were closely involved with them and they told different stories doesn't mean these people lying you got to find out where they got the information and the same thing goes for other people who had information sometimes they got it from friends or acquaintances who got it from Mark.

And the same thing during the police investigation they were hearing stories from people who'd talk to Mark and they were passing it on and they were confused some times because the stories weren't clicking or these were told to other people, like the church authorities, and they aren't telling the same story, Be very careful about that.

Also because of the nature of the case, a homicide, it made lot of people nervous and a lot of the people didn't know how to handle themselves. They did not know how to deal with it because you don't usually in your life, you usually don't become involved in a homicide case. So sometimes people's initial reactions weren't what the Police liked. But as George can tell you that after he was able to get in there, that the Church became very cooperative. Although the story goes the church was not cooperative and some people have claimed that even President Hinckley led a stalling of the case, that he was interfering with the investigation. George can probably give some highlights on his feelings on that. But be very careful about people who might take a story and embellish. I have a great one that relates here to FAIR, of people taking information and getting it in misconstrued.

A few months ago Scott Gordon of FAIR was kind enough to publish a letter that I wrote to Scott, in reference to some items on the deadly scroll, a lead plate that was found down in Page, Arizona. I made a comment that I had thought was true that a document written by Mark Hoffman in prison listing the forgeries that he had done. Now I had always thought been told that it was following a suicide attempt when he was at the hospital that they found it during a search of his cell.

While reading some of the books I discovered that didn't happen after the suicide attempt that happened few months earlier. That when he was being interviewed, he referenced some threats that he had made at George and some of the members of the board of pardons, they did a cell search and they came up with this list. So even I had that

information that I wrote a letter to the Deseret News on that, and I put it in the article now I am going to have to change it. I have seen this happen all the time. That information that no one intended to be deceiving, but you just hear something in your own mind, and it regurgitates it, and it comes out differently. So we have to be careful of that. Oh by the way you'll notice down here at the bottom the name John D. Lee. Just a thought.

Steve Mayfield: Well also be careful when people talk about the Hoffman case where they have information, but they give you no name or source. This is one of the things that Mark like to play and people willing to go along and to keep secrets and still have I can't tell you. I am going to turn it now time over to George we can hear what he has to say, but, before I turn it over to George I want to make some personal comments about Mr. Throckmorton. These are nice thing so you don't have to worry Scott.

Back in 1991 I came over from Colorado because my career was going down the tube and my love life wasn't there anymore. Through my good friend Van Hale I worked for his business for a while, and in 1994 I hired on to work in the crime lab in the Salt Lake City Police department. I got back into my chosen career. A year later they changed the supervisory of the crime lab from an officer or a sergeant to a civilian and they brought in George Throckmorton.

And the thrill that I have had for last 10 years of working under his direction literally sitting at his feet, hearing stories and information about the Hoffman case has been one that has not only enriched my professional career but also my advocacy of things of Mormon. He has been kind enough to invite me into his life and his research and included me.

I want to tell you how much I have appreciated the opportunity to get to know him as a friend. I care about him dearly. He is a dear friend. I love him dearly. And I hope that he is here with us a long time because there is so much to share with us. I want to close with this, a question that I have of him, a reference to a statement that I read here in "Mormon Murders" the greatest book on the case I am sure.

This is during the time that George and his associate Bill Flynn were examining the documents down at the Church archives. This says "on the date Flynn's plane left for Arizona, Bill Flynn is from Phoenix, Arizona, a Church delegation led by Gordon Hinckley visited the conference room. They looked suspiciously at all the equipment while Throckmorton and Flynn explained the process. They have some questions but to Flynn's astonishment never asked them the most obvious question of all, are the documents genuine." George when you come up here I would be very interested here

about this experience. What's it like to have that experience with a leader of the Church? Maybe you can share that with us. Why do you think he didn't ask that question when he was here and you were there in his presence?

George Throckmorton: If I can respond to Mr. Mayfield's question. As I advance in age I have a tendency not to remember certain things and to remember other things even more than they actually happened. But as President Hinckley came in to visit us that day I don't remember it at all because it just never happened. In fact the closest association and some of you may have heard this story I've told once before. The closest association I ever had with President Hinckley was because of my friends. I have been in law enforcement as was mentioned almost 40 years and my son used to work at the Church office building. It was his job to get the cars ready for the General Authorities to take to their various assignments.

And this is the story that I heard about President Hinckley which took place several years ago. He likes to "hot rod." Is that the right expression? As he came to pick up a new car, they always have a chauffeur to drive around the first Presidency and some of the Apostles they can't drive too well. That as he came and saw the new car and his chauffeur was ready for him, he looked at it and he said "I've always wanted to drive a new car." He said "Is it all right if I drive?" Well what's the chauffeur going to say? But the chauffeur said well you know I've always wanted to sit in the back seat too.

So as they started driving down to Provo, President Hinckley's foot got little bit heavy, they were going a little too fast and as he looked in the mirror after hearing kind of an unusual noise he saw some red and blue lights flashing behind him and he pulled over to the right and the highway patrol men come up and looked in the car and went back and got on the air and called his dispatch and says "I need to speak with my supervisor."

And the supervisor got on and said "what's wrong?" He says "I just pulled over a very important person." He said "well who is it, is it Mayor Rocky Anderson?" He says "no, more important than him." He said "well is it the governor?" "No, more important than him." "Is it the President of the United States?" He says "no, more important than him." He said "well who is it?" He says I really don't know but President Hinckley is his chauffeur."

That's the only story I know of President Hinckley that's the closest I have ever come. But I can't say this, my involvement in this case lasted for 16 months. I entered the case about six weeks after the bombings took place. I was working for the Attorney General's office at the time as an investigator of white collar crime, with a background in forensic examination of documents. And there are many, many stories and the one thing I learned is that even the investigators have different theories on what happened. There were 11 of us for 16 months and if you talk to one investigator he will say one thing, you talk to another one he will say something else. And the reason being is we did different interviews. We spoke to different people. And about every morning we would meet

together as a group and discuss what had happened and so I heard a lot of stories from the other investigators and then we would get our assignments and then we would go out to conduct our investigation.

There are lot of things that I heard and that I experienced first hand that contradict so many things that are in the book, the various books that are out there. What I have done today I understand we've only got 20 minutes left if I understand and with time I have and there is supposed to be some cards being passed around, are those questions? Okay.

I am not going to tell you a whole lot about my involvement other than I am going to asking – answer questions that may be here. And if anybody else has raise your hand now and do it because in about 10 minutes I'll be answering. Most of you know a lot about this case and as I given talks in the past I talk about the elementary things that have happened and I am not going to do that today, I'll be happy to answer any question. But what I have is a brief overview of many things.

I just took over 700 slides of different documents. I have never shown them, and I will never will be able to show them. We spend three days once in our professional organization in Palm Springs, California several years ago to go over them. I was unable to show them all them. But, what I have done is put a montage of slides together which will give you a brief but more or less a thorough overview of the case itself.

Click here for the slides:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfuKOWSMOps&feature=watch_response_rev