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Author(s) Jacob D. Rawlins

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Abstract The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* was founded in 1992 to be a forum through which faithful LDS scholars could highlight their research on the historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological contexts of the Book of Mormon. Since its founding by Stephen D. Ricks, four other scholars have served as editors of this publication: John L. Sorenson, S. Kent Brown, Andrew H. Hedges, and Paul Y. Hoskisson. Under these scholars' stewardship, the *Journal* has developed into the flagship publication of the Maxwell Institute. This article features not only the history of the *Journal* but also perspectives from each of the editors.



Journal Retrospective: Perspective from the Editors

Jacob D. Rawlins

IN 1992, WHEN STEPHEN D. RICKS PROPOSED a new academic journal focusing on the Book of Mormon, his goal was to encourage serious research of the Book of Mormon and to publish that research to the widest possible audience. Ricks, along with John W. Welch, Daniel C. Peterson, and others, had participated in publishing a newsletter, research updates, and important books, including John Sorenson's seminal *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* and the first volumes of the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, through the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) since 1978. The new journal, however, would be something different—in Ricks's words, “a forum devoted to the serious and faithful study of the Book of Mormon in its historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological context.”

The first volume of the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* delivered on the vision Ricks had for the new publication. Eleven scholars contributed articles on a wide range of topics—including geography, economics, customs, cultures, laws and legal systems, language studies, and an examination of the possible origins of the name *Nephi*. Subsequent issues of the *Journal* followed the same pattern: Faithful scholars from diverse disciplines used their expertise to contribute to the academic study of the

Book of Mormon. During Ricks's five-year tenure as editor, more than 140 articles were published in the *Journal*—a staggering amount of scholarship that redefined the landscape of the research on the Book of Mormon.

In 1997, John L. Sorenson replaced Ricks as the editor of the *Journal*. While Sorenson wanted to continue the tradition of excellent scholarship, he felt that the *Journal* had potential to reach a far wider audience. He proposed a change in the *Journal's* format, from the traditional 6" x 9", unillustrated format to a larger, illustrated format that would appeal to an expanded readership. In Sorenson's words, “the plan was to seek competent Book of Mormon scholars willing to present first-rate scholarship in accessible language and in a visually attractive format.”

In addition to attracting a larger audience, Sorenson also desired a larger, more diverse pool of contributors. He worked tirelessly to encourage scholars from many parts of the world to write articles for the *Journal*. In his time as editor, more than fifty different scholars contributed articles; many of these scholars were located at places other than at BYU.

In 2002, after five years as editor, Sorenson passed the *Journal* on to S. Kent Brown, who had

served as associate editor under Sorenson. Brown built on the vision for the *Journal* begun by Ricks and expanded by Sorenson. As part of his efforts to broaden the range of the articles in the *Journal*, Brown invited a number of diverse scholars to serve as associate editors or on the editorial advisory board. Brown wrote, “In time, the *Journal* enjoyed the supporting commitment of an international group of historians and linguists and anthropologists and literary savants who served on one or the other board.”

During Brown’s tenure, the focus of the *Journal* expanded to include articles on early LDS Church history (especially regarding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon), translations of the Book of Mormon into other languages, and early missionary work, as well as a recurring feature that spotlighted individual conversion stories.

After six years as the editor, Brown retired, leaving the *Journal* as the premier publication of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, which had been organized in 2006 to include FARMS and other departments. Brown’s retirement and Andrew Hedges’s appointment as the new editor allowed the Maxwell Institute to reevaluate the mission and scope of the *Journal*. The topics covered in its pages had been diverse since the first issue, but over the years the focus on the Book of Mormon had expanded to include other topics related to LDS scripture and history. Hedges proposed a formal expansion of the *Journal*, with a name change, to include all restoration scripture—Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, as well as other material from Church history, such as the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible and material from the ongoing Joseph Smith Papers Project. The new journal, now titled the *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*, will continue the vision of all of the previous editors: To be “a venue where scholars from a variety of backgrounds can explore, discuss, and even debate important topics relating to the texts, contexts, and meaning of latter-day scripture.”

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

While each issue of the *Journal* has had significant articles that have furthered scholarship on the Book of Mormon, certain issues stand out as milestones in the *Journal*’s history.

Issue 1/1 (1992). The first issue of the *Journal* represents a landmark in publications on the Book of Mormon. Not only was it the beginning of a new wave of LDS scholarship, but it also contains some of the most significant articles published on the Book of Mormon, which stand up to scrutiny even eighteen years later.

Issue 4/1 (1995). In 1995, the editors of the *Journal* paid tribute to the late Sidney B. Sperry, who, along with Hugh Nibley and John Sorenson, pioneered the systematic study of the Book of Mormon. This issue contains tributes, memorials, a bibliography, and twenty-five of Sperry’s articles on the Book of Mormon.

Issue 7/1 (1998). When John Sorenson took over the editorship of the *Journal*, he initiated a change to a larger format, complete with extensive illustrations, including both photographs and fine artwork. Sorenson did not, however, abandon the academic rigor applied to earlier issues of the *Journal*. This first issue in the new format introduces a discussion on Lehi’s trail and the location of Nephi’s Bountiful that has continued in the pages of the *Journal* for the past decade.

Issue 9/2 (2000). In a short article near the back of *JBMS* 9/2, John Sorenson addresses the difficulty of using DNA to establish any sort of link between modern native Americans and the peoples of the Book of Mormon—years before the use of DNA became a controversial issue to opponents of the Book of Mormon. Sorenson’s work was later expanded and supported by geneticists and DNA scientists in *JBMS* 12/1.

Issue 13/1–2 (2004). One of several themed issues produced during Kent Brown’s editorship, *JBMS* 13/1–2 focuses on the Hill Cumorah, including articles on its location, history, traditions, and the Hill Cumorah Pageant.

Issue 15/2 (2006). In another themed issue, Kent Brown presents the views of various scholars on Lehi’s trail from Jerusalem to the land Bountiful, where they launched the ship that would take them to the promised land.

Issue 17/1–2 (2008). Under its new editor, Andrew Hedges, the *Journal* once again undergoes a transformation—in title, scope, and design. This new beginning for the *Journal* represents an expansion of the original vision set forth by Stephen Ricks.

EDITORS' PERSPECTIVE

STEPHEN D. RICKS

The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* originated in discussions among John W. Welch, Daniel C. Peterson, and myself in 1992. We decided to found the *Journal* as a forum devoted to the serious and faithful study of the Book of Mormon in its historical, linguistic, cultural, and theological context. It took next to no time coming up with the title of the journal, *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, and it has, I am happy to say, stuck through many years.

We brought our proposal to the board of directors of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, who approved it, along with our board of editors, which included Kay P. Edwards, Robert L. Millet, Donald W. Parry, and David R. Seely (we later added Brian Hauglid and Gaye Strathearn).

Intending to be “no respecter of persons” in our selection of papers to be included in forthcoming issues, we did not insist that those publishing in the *Journal* have certain academic credentials. We did, however, ask that the work be rigorous, carefully thought out, and well presented. At first we advertised for submissions—even soliciting some papers—but since the significance of a journal

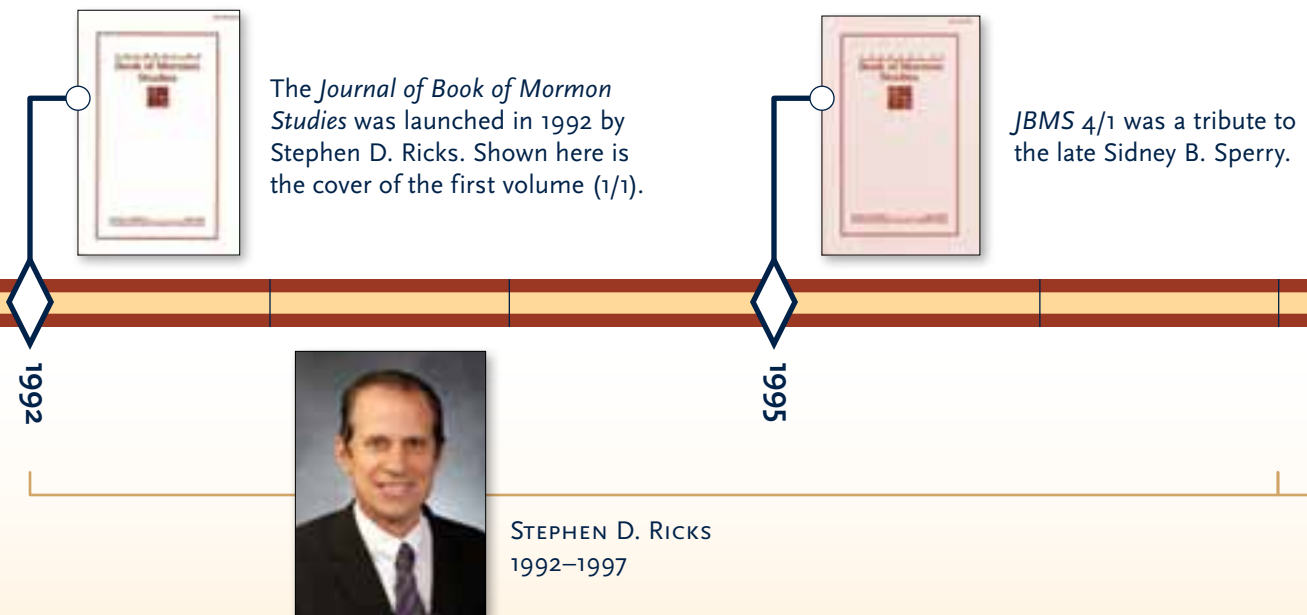
devoted to this particular subject caught on, it has taken on a life of its own.

While I enjoyed all of the articles published during my tenure as editor, I am most pleased that the *Journal* became a forum for investigations of proper names and their origins in the Book of Mormon (a topic I hope to turn into a book-length study). Through the years, the *Journal* has continued the vision we first presented to the FARMS Board in 1992. I hope to see that work continue for many more years to come.

JOHN L. SORENSON

When Stephen Ricks and others launched the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* in the fall of 1992, I enthusiastically supported the idea and the effort by contributing a significant piece (“When Lehi’s Party Arrived, Did They Find Others in the Land?”) that appeared as the first article in volume 1, number 1.

I was still an enthusiast upon learning in 1997 that a follow-on editor was being sought. Feeling that the publication had not yet reached its potential, I presented a proposal to the officers of FARMS to serve as the new editor, under certain conditions. First, I would require the aid of two mature associate editors, S. Kent Brown and M. Gerald Bradford.



The second condition was that the format of the *Journal* be substantially changed in order to attract an expanded readership. Taking *Scientific American* as a general model, the plan was to seek competent Book of Mormon scholars willing to present first-rate scholarship in accessible language and in a visually attractive format.

Acceptance of the proposal implied that substantially more FARMS resources would be directed toward preparing the *Journal*. In fact it became the flagship publication of the Foundation that would go to all member/subscribers twice per year.

Secondary concerns at that stage were to invite a widened range of writers to contribute and to assist them to prepare their articles at an appropriate level of clarity and rigor. The visual quality of the *Journal* depended on the talent of excellent designers, particularly Bjorn Pendleton. In some cases specific works of art began to be commissioned for use in the *Journal*.

An additional goal was to increase the variety of contributors. In three and one-half years the work of 35 different authors was published, half of them located at places other than BYU.

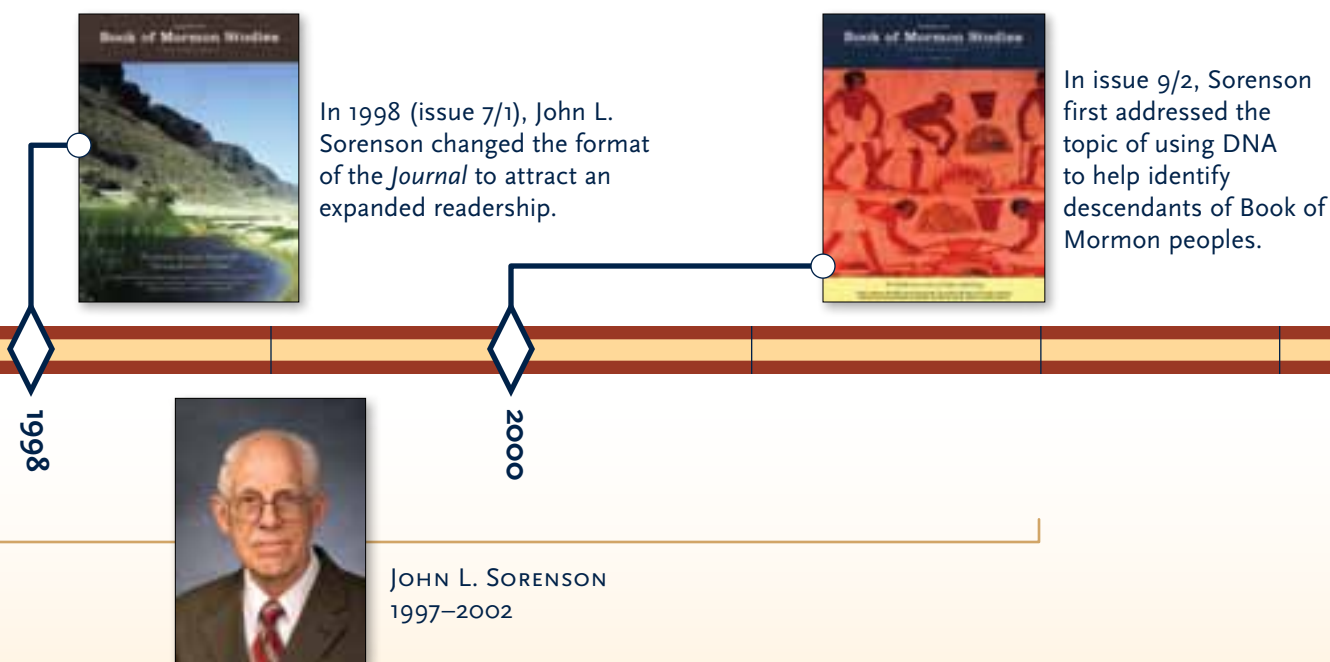
Those who have invested effort in the *Journal* can look forward to progress in future publishing of not only articles on the Book of Mormon, but also

now on a wider range of scholarship on the other restoration scriptures.

S. KENT BROWN

How do I characterize my editorial years with the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*? I was introduced to this world through John L. Sorenson, who succeeded the first editor, Stephen D. Ricks. Dr. Sorenson graciously invited me to be one of his associate editors in 1997. I was thrilled to be able to work with someone of Dr. Sorenson's abilities and interests. When he stepped aside after five years, I accepted the invitation from FARMS to succeed him. I felt that I could do no better than to hold the *Journal* in the channel that he had carved.

My interests largely mirrored those of my two predecessors—to broaden the range of topics covered by the *Journal* (that is, to explore both the ancient dimensions of the text and the modern story of the Book of Mormon) and to stretch the pool of contributors. In this light, my first task was to invite not only a diverse group to serve on the board of associate editors, but also an equally diverse group to act as an editorial advisory board. In time, the *Journal* enjoyed the supporting commitment of an international group of historians and linguists and anthropologists and literary savants



who served on one or the other board. For me, it was a very satisfying moment when the last person on my list said yes.

In retrospect, what would I judge to be the most significant issue of the *Journal*? Perhaps I could measure by the fact that we completely ran out of one issue, the one that dealt in large measure with the question of DNA and Native American origins (*JBMS* 12/1). I do not take credit for inaugurating the issue of the *Journal* that dealt with this question. The suggestion came from John Sorenson, who correctly anticipated that the question of DNA and its ability, or inability, to solve questions that tie to Book of Mormon origins would become important.

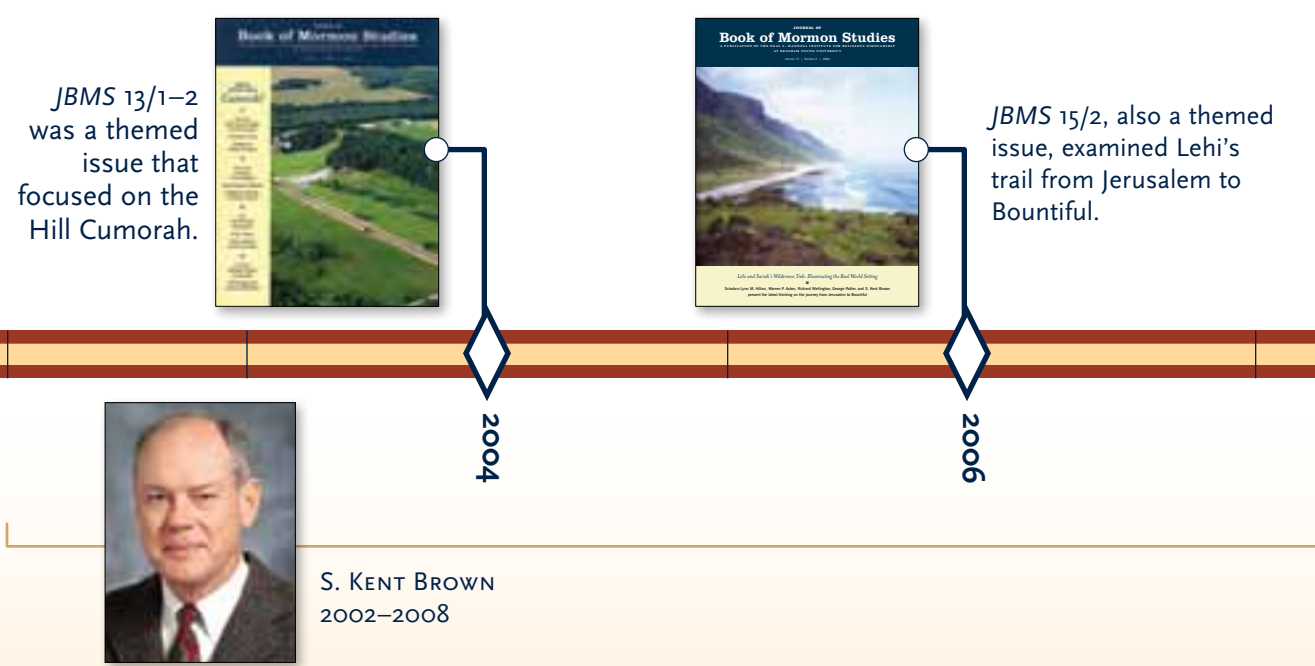
Naturally, the whole effort to put together issues of the *Journal* was filled with little disappointments and joyful triumphs. With this said, the biggest payoff for me was the deepened relationships with people who made efforts to submit studies or contributed their time to the editorial process by reviewing studies in the early stages. I am forever in their debt.

ANDREW HEDGES

The *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* was first published in 1992, under the editorial direction of Stephen D. Ricks. Seven years later John L.

Sorenson, as the *Journal's* new editor, changed its format to make the contents more accessible to specialist and nonspecialist readers alike. Under the direction of Sorenson's successor, S. Kent Brown, the *Journal* has continued to feature first-rate scholarship on the Book of Mormon, often accompanied by beautiful visual aids and images. Thanks to these scholars' vision and editorial skills, thousands of people now enjoy the *Journal* either as subscribers or through the Internet, where they are able to stay abreast of the best that scholarship has to offer on the Book of Mormon.

Partly as a result of the *Journal's* success, and partly in answer to the apparent need for a scholarly, faithful venue in which other latter-day scriptures can regularly be discussed, with volume 17, the *Journal's* scope was expanded to include all of what might be termed "Restoration Scripture"—those books of Latter-day Saint scripture and related texts that were revealed through the ministry of the Prophet Joseph Smith. These include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. With the expansion in scope came a name change, to the *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*—"the Book of Mormon" being retained in the title not only to help provide a sense of continuity with the former title but also



in recognition of that book's continuing role as the keystone of the Mormon faith.

Our hope is that the expanded *Journal* will be a venue where scholars from a variety of backgrounds can explore, discuss, and even debate important topics relating to the texts, contexts, and meaning of latter-day scripture. We believe that part of this includes reexamining and unpacking familiar assumptions and arguments—even those that have found their best expression in past issues of the *Journal* and related publications. We believe, too, that there are many topics yet to be explored in both the Book of Mormon and other restoration scriptures and hope contributors and readers alike will consider the *Journal* a fitting venue for introducing new subjects and directions for study.

PAUL Y. HOSKISSON

On assuming my new duties as editor of the *Journal*, a few words of thanks on my part would be appropriate.

Thanks and honor go to Stephen Ricks for getting the *Journal* off the ground. He oversaw the fledgling years, helped it grow from one issue a year to two, and set the original bar high. Without Stephen's early efforts, neither the quality nor the quantity that we have come to expect from the

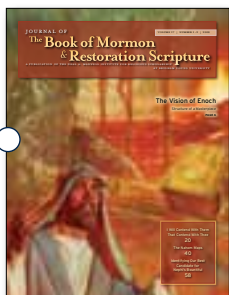
Journal would have been set in place for those that followed.

John Sorenson, after many years as professor of anthropology at BYU, became the next editor. John moved the *Journal* in a slightly different direction. He enlarged the format and added numerous illustrations in a successful attempt to attract an even wider audience.

To S. Kent Brown, friend, colleague, and gentleman, I owe much, and not just as past editor. He has been a mentor to me since I first came to BYU in 1981. Kent has always held the bar high for himself and others. During his tenure as editor the *Journal* printed a wider range of excellent articles than heretofore, thus setting the stage for the expansion that came with the next editor.

To my predecessor, friend, former student, and now colleague, Andrew H. Hedges, goes the credit for expanding the *Journal* to formally include more than just Book of Mormon studies. Having a PhD in American history and an MA in ancient Near Eastern Studies made him the ideal person to expand the scope and territory the *Journal* would cover. Short though his tenure has been, he has had a profound influence on the future direction of the *Journal*.

It is an honor to be associated with these capable and distinguished editors. ■



With issue 17/1–2, the *Journal* became known as the *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Restoration Scripture* and underwent a design update.



With issue 18/1, the title of the *Journal* was expanded to *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture*. Issue 18/2 is the first to have articles about the Doctrine and Covenants and the Restoration.

2008



ANDREW HEDGES
2008–2009

2009



PAUL Y. HOSKISSON
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