

Michael Hubbard MacKay, *Sacred Space: Exploring the Birthplace of Mormonism*. Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, in cooperation with Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, 2016. xiv, 129 pp. Photographs, endnotes, index. Cloth, copyright page: \$14.99; sells for: \$17.99. ISBN 978-0-8425-2979-2

Reviewed by H. Michael Marquardt

Sacred Space was written with the purpose of overturning the recognized historical location of events, such as baptisms, of the Church of Christ on April 6, 1830 at Manchester, New York.

The little book is a propaganda piece based upon emotion rather than history. The author is more interested in his sacred space than in what the historical record brings to the story of the Restoration. The earliest documents and recollections point to the establishing of the Church of Christ at one location. The church publication *The Evening and the Morning Star* clearly states, with Oliver Cowdery and John Whitmer assisting in the printing office, that the Church of Christ was organized at Manchester. There was no series of meetings at two different locations on that day. Fayette, New York has a place in Restoration history but not on April 6.

The correct location of Manchester as the place of establishment, baptisms and revelations has been widely accepted by scholars because of research and publications such as the coauthored book *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, published over twenty years ago, as well as articles and reviews in journals and on the Internet. In 1992, for example, in an article published in *Sunstone* I explained: “For these important [church] conferences, Peter Whitmer Sr.’s log home and farm should retain fundamental historical and sentimental position in Smith’s Church of Christ, but not for the location of its organization.”¹

In *Sacred Space*, great emphasis is placed on one copy of a revelation (LDS D&C 21) that names the location of its reception as Fayette but was corrected to Manchester in the Book of Commandments (hereafter BC). The author offers no insight into how the BC was produced. The headings giving dates and locations in the BC manuscript were subject to correction. According to a revelation, Oliver Cowdery was to assist printer William W. Phelps “to copy, and to correct, and select, that all things may be right before me, as it shall be proved by the Spirit through him” (LDS D&C 57:13; not selected for BC).²

Sacred Space makes a personal attack: “Marquardt argues that the shift in location exposes a series of lies told by Smith and the leadership of the Church” (17) and “Marquardt’s research not only challenged the origin of the Church but also framed the Prophet Joseph Smith as a fraud” (88). Nothing could be further from the truth. MacKay is trying to poison the well. Most readers will not be taken in by this short book built upon emotion.

I have always been open to discussions on Mormon history and have helped others. This book offers no new sources and repeats the same quotations again and again. The humble Manchester cabin where the parents of the prophet resided is the church’s birthplace, not the Peter Whitmer home in Fayette.

¹ H. Michael Marquardt, “An Appraisal of Manchester as Location for the Organization of the Church,” *Sunstone* 16:1 (February 1992):56.

² See H. Michael Marquardt, *Joseph Smith’s 1828-1843 Revelations* (Maitland, Florida: Xulon Press, 2013), 125-26.