

CHAPTER 2

David Ramsay's Historical Accounts

"History is written by the victors" has been credited to Winston Churchill. History can also be written with a slant or agenda, instead of in a purely clinical fashion.

David Ramsay (1749-1815) produced two works on the Revolution. His *History of the American Revolution* in two volumes appeared in 1789. After George Washington's death in 1799 he published *The Life of George Washington* in 1807 duplicating much from his 1789 *History*.

Ramsay, along with his contemporary historians, used the scenes of the Revolution as a vehicle to teach moral lessons. Mercy Otis Warren (1728-1814) in her *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* freely admits to inserting "moral observations" throughout the account. God, virtue and history were not separate.

Documenting and crediting sources was a practice seldom applied. Ramsay was noted for having plagiarized the *Annual Register*. The message seemed to take precedence over accuracy. Lester H. Cohen, modern editor of Ramsay's *History* offers this observation on the era,

"First, scholarly citation as we know it was not an issue for eighteenth-century writers, who honored the practice, if at all, only in the most irregular and idiosyncratic manner. Second, eighteenth-century American histories were performances, not proofs; they more nearly resemble sermons, which inspire by enunciating principles and applying them to human situations, than scientific or legal discourses, which depend for their cogency and persuasiveness on their marshalling of evidence." (1)

The *Book of Mormon* seems to engage in the same practice. Instead of being a record of ancient American Hebrews it reads more like an eighteenth-century sermon or history. Mormon scholars are not even sure as to the exact location in which the story takes place. Details of geography in the *Book of Mormon* are sketchy and second to the message. Couple the nondescript topography with the heavy

borrowings from Washington, Ramsay, and their contemporaries and the *Book of Mormon* is guilty of the same practice of borrowing, not crediting sources, and applying selective details in favor of sermonizing.

Ramsay had first hand experience in scenes of the Revolution and he also had access to a significant amount of documents. In his account of Arnold's invasion of Quebec he paraphrases briefly from Washington's manifesto,

"A manifesto subscribed by general Washington, which had been sent from Cambridge with this detachment, was circulated among the inhabitants of Canada. In this they were invited to arrange themselves under the standard of general liberty; and they were informed that the American army was sent into the province not to plunder but to protect them."(2)

If it is assumed that Joseph Smith was borrowing from the Canada letter there is not enough of it reproduced by Ramsay to justify the proposition. However, if Smith read the entire *History* he would have been exposed to all of the verbiage contained in the Canada letter.

For instance, Ramsay does not mention Washington's word string,

"...our Liberty, our Property; our Wives and our Children..."

when discussing the Canada letter. But, on page 227 of the *History* he talks about a charter of the state of New York and uses the word string

"...liberties, property, wives and children..."(3)

This string occurs only once in Ramsay's two volume *History* and is not duplicated in his *Life of George Washington*. Moroni repeats the theme with a minor adjustment,

"Their liberty, their lands, their wives, and their children." Alma 48:10

Ramsay closely paraphrases Washington's

"...range yourselves under the Standard of general Liberty..."

from the Canada letter as,

“...arrange themselves under the standard of general liberty...”

Moroni uses the smaller phrase,

62:4 “standard of liberty” Alma

Ramsay repeats the exact phrase,

646 “standard of liberty” *History* pg.

Additionally, on page 85 of the *History* is found,

“the blessings of liberty”

and on page 162,

“a free government”,

both of which are duplicated in the Canada letter and the *Book of Mormon*.

In *The Life of George Washington* Ramsay quotes the General from a speech to the troops saying,

“We have therefore to resolve to conquer or to die.”(4)

Moroni, in Alma 56:17 also says,

“...they were determined to conquer in this place or die...”

Throughout the *History* and *Life of George Washington* Ramsay reproduces all of Washington’s essential verbiage and themes. The evidence indicates that it would not have been necessary for Joseph Smith to read Washington’s letter to obtain the ideas and wording. All he had to do was read Ramsay. The *History of the American Revolution* and *Life of George Washington* are listed among the books available in the Manchester, New York library not far from Joseph Smith’s home. (5) While this is not evidence that Smith actually frequented the library it does document the availability of the

resource.

The parallels to the *Book of Mormon* do not stop there. Additional word for word, theme, and concept repetitions occur in Ramsay beyond the scope of the Canada letter.

Ramsay's *History* on page 324 faults the rulers of Great Britain for being blinded by,

“...the lust of power and of gain...”

In the *Book of Mormon* a warning is given,

“And whatsoever nation shall uphold such secret combinations, to get power and gain...shall be destroyed...”
Ether 8:22

Unbridled ambition, power, avarice and greed are identified by historians such as Ramsay and Warren as the main motivation of the Crown in bringing war to the colonies. Washington in his farewell address laments the abuse of power and unchecked government. Ramsay reproduces the address in chapter 12, part 2 of the *Life of George Washington*.

Washington warns against faction with these comments,

“However combinations or associations of the above description may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people, and to usurp for themselves the reins of government...”

Washington also notes that,

“...love of power, and the proneness to abuse it...”

predominates the human heart.

The *Book of Mormon* character Moroni sees the same forces at work and sounds a warning concerning,

“...those who have desires to usurp power and authority...” Alma

60:27

“...the desire of power and authority...”

Alma

60:16

“Secret combinations” are denounced throughout the *Book of Mormon* narrative. Kings and “king-men” are blamed for the bloodshed and misery suffered by the Nephites. Moroni spends as much time fighting faction and intrigue as he does in battling the Lamanites.

Ramsay faults the Tories, who were colonial king-men, on page 623 of the *History*,

“It was the general opinion of the Americans, that the continuance of the war, and the asperity with which it had been carried on, was more owing to the machinations of their own countrymen, who had taken part with the royal government, than to their British enemies. It is certain that the former had been most active in predatory excursions, and most forward in scenes of blood and murder...the authors of so great a share of the general distress...”

Likewise, Moroni accuses Nephite king-men of the same crime,

“...had it not been for the war which broke out among ourselves; yea, were it not for these king-men who caused so much bloodshed among ourselves...”

Alma 60:16

The Tories of the Revolution and the “king-men” of the *Book of Mormon* play the same role. The evils of kings and their court, seeking power and gain, are enumerated in both cases. The threats of faction and conspiracy are illuminated. The freedom loving Americans and the ancient Nephites both denounce intrigue and combinations.

Ramsay quotes Washington in chapter 3 of the *Life*,

“...you are freemen, fighting for the blessings of Liberty...”

Ramsay refers to “virtuous freemen” on page 406 of the *History*.

Ramsay also authored a pamphlet titled, *An Address to the Freemen of South Carolina, on the Subject of the Federal Constitution*. The term “freemen” was in common use in colonial

America.

The same title of “freemen” is assigned to *Book of Mormon* characters in Alma 51:6. These are individuals who remain faithful to the principles of freedom. Note how the following verse in Alma brings together many of the previous concepts and verbiage,

“...the Nephites were inspired by a better cause, for they were not fighting for monarchy nor power but they were fighting for their homes and their liberties, their wives and their children...”
Alma 43:45

Moroni’s freemen are hampered in their fight in similar fashion to colonial soldiers. Washington’s troops are often without supplies due to ineptitude and lack of co-ordination from Philadelphia. Moroni’s men suffer deprivation because of rebellion in the Nephite capitol city of Zarahemla,

“...they have withheld our provisions, and have daunted our freemen...”
Alma
61:4

Eventually, the patriotic Nephite freemen are driven out of their capitol city Zarahemla,

“...those dissenters who had driven the freemen out of the land of Zarahemla and had taken possession of the land.”
Alma
62:6

Ramsay, on page 294 of the *History*, documents the evacuation of Congress from Philadelphia to Baltimore, and the British invasion,

“...the people giving up the cause, some of their leaders going over to the enemy...”

“...the neighborhood of Philadelphia became the seat of war... They therefore adjourned themselves to meet in eight days at Baltimore...”

Book of Mormon freemen are driven from their capitol city, Zarahemla, by king-men. American freemen are driven from their

capitol city, Philadelphia, by king-men. Each group takes up arms in defense of their liberty, their property, their wives, and their children. Each group must fight a faction within that wants to be subservient to a king. Each group suffers extensive loss due to the infighting and the desire for power and gain.

Book of Mormon verbiage and themes are a parallel of documented Revolutionary war accounts. This is the central argument of *Book of Mormon Tories*. Mormon apologists would like to believe that all of the previous similarities are nothing more than history repeating itself. It is the contention of this research that the *Book of Mormon* is merely a fictional story repeating history and not a case of history repeating itself.

If only a few parallels were documented it could be argued that they were meaningless due to simple commonality or similar subject matter. But the parallels are not few, they are numerous and often exact.

A strong theme of Colonial America was equality and unity. Ramsay points out that the Americans were uncomfortable with the class distinctions fostered by European society. The Americans were,

“...unaccustomed to that distinction of ranks...” *History* pg. 30

The *Book of Mormon* society begins to separate when class distinctions arise over money and education,

“And the people began to be distinguished by ranks...” 3 Nephi 6:12

Ramsay describes battlefield maneuvers and tactics. On page 426 of the *History*, General Howe orders a retreat due to,

“...finding himself attacked in the rear
as well as in the front...”

Helaman, in the *Book of Mormon* uses the same language,

“...bring them up in the rear at the same time
they were met in the front...”

Alma

56:23

In chapter 4 of the *Life of George Washington* Ramsay recounts a sneak attack,

“The Americans moved from their encampment on the Skippack road in the evening of the 3rd of October, with the intention of surprising their adversaries early next morning, and to attack both wings in front and rear at the same time...”

Book of Mormon troops employ the same strategy,
“And this they did do in the night-time, and got on their march beyond the robbers so that on the morrow, when the robbers began their march, they were met by the armies of the Nephites both in their front and in their rear.”
3 Nephi 4:25

More troop movements in the dark are mentioned,

383 “...a night march...” *History* pg.

58:27 “...march in the night-time...” Alma

380 “...night put an end to the action...” *History* pg.

62:35 “...they did encamp for the night...” Alma

Ramsay uses terms to illustrate the power of the enemy while *Book of Mormon* Lamanites follow suit,

298 “...the British were driving the Americans before them.” *History* pg.

51:28 “...driving the Nephites before them...” Alma

Sometimes the battle lines shift back and forth,

378	“The Americans and British alternately drove, and were driven by each other.”	<i>History</i> pg.
11:18	“...and they were driven back, or they drove them back...”	Mosiah
175	Revolutionary and Lamanite armies are, “...pressed upon their rear...”	<i>History</i> pg.
52:36	“...pressed upon their rear...”	Alma
339	The armies are also, “...harassed in the rear...”	<i>History</i> pg.
51:32	“...they did harass them...”	Alma
379	Enemies are everywhere, “...to the left...”	<i>History</i> pg.
56:37	“...to the left...”	Alma
380	“...on the right...”	<i>History</i> pg.
58:17	“...on the right...”	Alma
435	Armies can be found positioned near rivers, “...on both sides of the North river...”	<i>History</i> pg.
43:52	“...on both sides of the river...”	Alma
412	“...crossed the Delaware...”	<i>History</i> pg.
	“...crossed the river...”	Alma

2:35		
	“...river Delaware...”	<i>History</i> pg.
343		
	“...river Sidon...”	Alma
2:15		
	Troops move undetected,	
	“...by a secret way to the Three Rivers...”	<i>History</i> pg.
217		
	“...they took their flight out of the land, by a secret way...”	Helaman
2:11		
	Some maneuvers are conducted quietly,	
	“They kept such a profound silence that they were not heard by the British...”	<i>History</i> pg.
187		
	“...and all those things were done in a profound silence.”	Alma
55:17		
	The landscape is described with similar words,	
	“...the narrow passage...”	<i>History</i> pg.
272		
	“...the narrow passage...”	Mormon
2:29		
	“...neck of land...”	<i>History</i> pg.
118		
	“...neck of land...”	Alma
22:32		

The previous comparisons do not imply that Ramsay created these phrases or that Joseph Smith copied from him exclusively. Rather, they are itemized to show that *Book of Mormon* expressions are not unique. Smith did not need to be a military expert in order to sound like one, nor did he have to experience the battlefield. Ramsay,

along with other historians, had all that Smith would need to spin his story. The sentiments and language of Ramsay, the principles he enumerates, the specific terms and descriptions of defenses, tactical phrases, and patriotic causes are all repeated in the *Book of Mormon*.

Ramsay mentions the,

156 “...spirit of freedom...” *History* pg.

As does the *Book of Mormon*,

60:25 “...spirit of freedom...” Alma

Ramsay lists various terms for Deity and the *Book of Mormon* repeats them.

131 “...appealing to that Being...” *History* pg.

5:2 “...calling upon that Being...” Mormon

15 “...their Creator...” *History* pg.

1:7 “...their Creator...” Omni

211 “...the great Jehovah...” *History* pg.

10:34 “...the great Jehovah...” Moroni

Ramsay and the *Book of Mormon* share further similarities regarding flags,

442 “...planted the standard of loyalty...” *History* pg.

46:36 “...planted the standard of liberty...” Alma

274 “...flock to their standard...” *History* pg.
62:5 “...flock unto his standard...” Alma

Decisions about battle plans are held in,

363 “...a council of war...” *History* pg.
52:19 “...a council of war...” Alma

Sometimes people suffer,

295 “...an ignominious death...” *History* pg.
1:15 “...an ignominious death...” Alma

Both talk about taking an advantage,

618 “...gain their point...” *History* pg.
46:29 “...gain the point...” Alma

Ramsay documents a slaughter of pacifist Native Americans. The Muskingum Indians adhered to a religious conviction of not defending themselves even when being murdered. Likewise, a pacifist group in the *Book of Mormon* allow themselves to be killed rather than fight back.

475 “...put to death these harmless, inoffensive people,
though they made no resistance...” *History* pg.

27:3 “...they suffered themselves to be slain...” Alma

Ramsay relates the farewell of George Washington, with a French goodbye,

644 “...and by waving his hat,
bid them a silent adieu...” *History* pg.

The *Book of Mormon* adds a little French,
7:24 “Brethren, adieu...” Jacob

The British would press captive citizens into service. Ramsay discusses the sentiments of those forced to fight their countrymen. *A Book of Mormon* tyrant entices his followers to do the same.

485 “...an affection for their American brethren,
and shuddered at the thought of
taking up arms against them...” *History* pg.

2:10 “...commanded them that they should
take up arms against their brethren...” Alma

213 “...compel the inhabitants to take arms...” *History* pg.

47:3 “...compel them to arms...” Alma

Ramsay describes Arnold’s trek to Canada as,

220 “The bold enterprise of one American army
marching through the wilderness...” *History* pg.

Lamanite armies also,

43:24 “...were marching round about in the wilderness...” Alma

More marching terms are shared.

Ramsay

Book of Mormon

“...began their march...” pg. 341 “...began their march...” 3 Nephi 4:25

“...had begun his march...” pg. 573 “...had begun his march...” Alma 52:15

“...marched over...” pg. 381 “...marched over...” Alma 43:25

“...fatigued with their preceding march...” pg. 375 “...weary because of their march...” Alma 58:52

Army terms are shared.

Ramsay

Book of Mormon

“...his whole army...” pg. 355 “...his whole army...” Helaman 1:20

“...at the head of his army...” pg. 385 “...at the head of his army...” Alma 49:10

“...part of his army...” pg. 380 “...part of his army...” Alma 43:25

“...little army...” pg. 425 “...little army...” Alma 56:19

“...little band...” pg. 486 “...little band...” Alma 57:6

Victory or defeat hangs in the balance during,

“...these critical circumstances...” *History* pg. 448

“...those critical circumstances...” Alma

57:16

“...the critical time...” *History* pg.

512

“...a critical time...” Alma

51:9

Colonists and Nephite armies are sustained by a,

“...supply of provisions...” *History*

pg.9

“...supply of provisions...” Alma

57:6

Defenses are often built in haste and earth is utilized,

“...a work was thrown up...” *History* pg.

478

“...the bank which had been thrown up...” Alma

49:18

“...formed of earth with a parapet and ditch...” *History* pg.

276

“...and they cast up dirt out of the ditch...” Alma

53:4

Similar descriptions of defenses continue,

Ramsay

Book of Mormon

“...fortifications erected...” pg. 360 “...erect fortifications...” Alma
50:10

“...were strongly fortified...” pg. 206 “...were strongly fortified...” Alma
51:27

“...places of security...” pg. 345 “...places of security...” Alma
50:4

“...place of retreat...” 49:11	pg. 368	“...places of retreat...”	Alma
“...a ditch, and a bank...” 53:4	pg. 568	“...bank of the ditch...”	Alma
“...formed of piquets...” 50:3	pg. 364	“...frame of pickets...”	Alma
“...surrounded with a ditch...” 53:3	pg. 568	“...digging a ditch...”	Alma

Ramsay notes the principles for which the Americans fight. The *Book of Mormon* duplicates the sentiments.

Ramsay

Book of Mormon

“...the cause of liberty...” 51:17	pg. 90	“...the cause of liberty...”	Alma
“...the cause of American liberty...” 58:12	pg. 512	“...the cause of our liberty...”	Alma
“...in the cause of their country...” 56:11	pg. 460	“...in the cause of their country...”	Alma
“...the justice of the cause...” 46:29	pg. 267	“...the justice of the cause...”	Alma
“...died in the cause of liberty...” 56:11	pg. 178	“...died in the cause of their country...”	Alma
“...in defence of their liberties...”	pg. 634	“...in the defence of your liberty...”	3 Nephi

3:2

“...rights and privileges...” 29:32	pg. 401	“...rights and privileges...”	Mosiah
“...to maintain their rights and privileges...” 51:6	pg. 232	“...to maintain their rights and the privileges...”	Alma
“...their rights and liberties...” 43:26	pg. 232	“...their rights and their liberties...”	Alma
“...safety and welfare...” 48:12	pg. 398	“...welfare and safety...”	Alma

On page 213 of the *History*, Ramsay documents British efforts to entice American Indians to battle colonials.

“Colonel Johnston had, on the same occasion, repeated conferences with the Indians, and endeavored to influence them to take up the hatchet, but they steadily refused. In order to gain their co-operation he invited them to feast on a Bostonian, and to drink his blood.”

The bravado of drinking blood is also in the *Book of Mormon*,

“...and he did curse God, and also Moroni, swearing with an oath that he would drink his blood...” 49:27			Alma
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There is more bloody verbiage between the works.

Ramsay		Book of Mormon	
“...fought and bled...” 60:9	pg. 541	“...fought and bled...”	Alma
“...spilling the blood...” 44:11	pg. 265	“...spill your blood...”	Alma

“...scene of bloodshed...” 28:10	pg. 522	“...scene of bloodshed...”	Alma
“...scenes of horror...” 4:11	pg. 470	“...horrible scene...”	Mormon
“...lost his life...” 14:30	pg. 441	“...lost his blood...”	Ether
“...received a wound...” 20:13	pg. 347	“...received a wound...”	Mosiah

Scalping is part of the violence,

469	“...killed and scalped...”	<i>History</i> pg.
44:12	“...took off his scalp...”	Alma

Tactical language and descriptions are shared.

Ramsay

Book of Mormon

“...surrendered themselves prisoners of war...” 57:14	pg. 269	“...surrendered themselves prisoners of war...”	Alma
“...obliged to flee...” 59:8	pg. 366	“...obliged to flee...”	Alma
“...making their escape...” 56:10	pg. 438	“...make their escape...”	Alma
“...cut off their retreat...” 4:24	pg. 380	“...cut off the way of their retreat...”	3 Nephi
“...armies which were coming against them...” 52:28	pg. 273	“...his army coming against them...”	Alma

“...commander in chief...”	pg. 415	“...chief commander...”	Alma
46:11			
“..their army was reduced...”	pg. 451	“...army had been reduced...”	Alma
56:10			
“...sword in one hand...”	pg. 266	“...sword in hand...”	Alma
57:15			
“...threw down their arms...”	pg. 380	“...threw down their weapons...”	Alma
52:38			
“...hemmed in...”	pg. 383	“...hemmed in...”	Alma
22:33			
“...the art of war...”	pg. 443	“...the arts of war...”	Ether
13:16			
“...withdraw themselves...”	pg. 399	“...withdraw themselves...”	3 Nephi
4:23			
“...great loss...”	pg. 345	“...great loss...”	Alma
51:11			

In the *Life of George Washington*, Ramsay mentions the many military frustrations and failures that plagued the Revolution. *Book of Mormon* armies experience a similar loss of morale, sharing the same language.

“The British General immediately marched his army back from Amboy,
with great expedition, hoping to bring on a general action on equal
ground; but he was disappointed...”

Life

Chap. 4

“...in this thing they were disappointed,
for the Nephites did not fear them...”
4:10

3 Nephi

“...we were disappointed in this our desire...” Alma
56:23

Ramsay and the *Book of Mormon* identify the shame of impotency due to inadequate supplies, men, and material as embarrassing.

“...the embarrassments which cramped the operations of Washington...” *Life*
Chap. 7

“...in a letter to congress he expressed his embarrassment...” *Life*
Chap. 7

“...among other embarrassments...” *History* pg.
376

“...the cause of these our embarrassments...” Alma
58:9

An interruption of military progress is mentioned in similar terms.

“...they felt unusual mortification from this unexpected check...” *History* pg.
376

“...did arrive in season to check them...” Alma
57:18

Moroni, the Nephite general, was so frustrated by a lack of supplies and men that he threatened to march upon his own government to solve the problem. Washington was more controlled in his personal resolve but he often had to quell uprisings in the ranks over the same issues.

“...the Americans severely felt the scarcity of provisions. Their murmurs became audible...” *History* pg.
488

“...were this all we had suffered we would not murmur...” Alma

60:4

Book of Mormon commanders speculate as to the reasons their government neglects the troops. Washington had the same obstructions.

“Faction at home, and intrigue and menace from abroad, endeavored to shake him...” *Life* Chap 13, part 2

“...the intrigues of the Lamanites...” Alma 55:27

“...we fear that there is some faction in the government...” Alma 58:36

“...a civil war was on the point of breaking out among his fellow citizens...” *Life* Chap 8

“...had it not been for the war which broke out among ourselves...” Alma 60:16

The specter of starvation threatens both Revolutionary and *Book of Mormon* armies.

“...at the risk of being starved...” *History* pg. 376

“...to perish for the want of food...” Alma 58:7

Ramsay uses transitional phrases as he relates the *History*. The *Book of Mormon* employs the same technique.

“Thus ended the...” *History* pg. 450

“Thus ended the...” Mosiah

29:47		
586	“I proceed to relate...”	<i>History</i> pg.
2:3	“I proceed with my record...”	Ether
440	“From these events...I return to relate...”	<i>History</i> pg.
43:3	“And now I return to an account...”	Alma
587	“...shall be hereafter related...”	<i>History</i> pg.
2:12	“...shall be spoken hereafter...”	Helaman

There are far more textual similarities between Ramsay and the *Book of Mormon*. It is not necessary to itemize every one to make the point that if Joseph Smith was dictating word for word from the gold plates then it seems incredible that ancient Americans could have been saying the exact same things.

In addition to the textual similarities, the major themes of Ramsay are all contained in the book Smith produced. The next chapter demonstrates how Mercy Otis Warren’s history adds to what has been itemized from Ramsay.

As the *History* concludes, Ramsay encourages readers to heed the lessons learned in the Revolution. Both David Ramsay and Mercy Otis Warren were writing to remind the current generation, and those that would follow, of the principles that made America free and prosperous.

It was their hope that their writing would inspire Americans to never forget, lest they lose what came at such a high price. As in their example, the *Book of Mormon* also sounds a warning to current and future readers.

“...for ensuring to the present and future generations...” *History* pg. 667

“...unto us as well as unto future generations...” Alma 24:14

Contemporary LDS prophets have lectured that the *Book of Mormon* was hidden and preserved from an ancient time to come forth in our day, that the lessons contained therein were specifically for the latter-days.

The day of the *Book of Mormon* is not ancient, the lessons taught were already penned by Ramsay and Warren.

It is of Joseph Smith's day.

Notes to Chapter 2

The History of the American Revolution, David Ramsay, Reprint edition by Liberty Fund, Lester H. Cohen editor, foreword xxxi.
The History of the American Revolution, David Ramsay, pg. 219-220.
(page sequences from the modern reprint by Liberty Fund)

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The Life of George Washington, David Ramsay, Chapter 3, Internet reprint, HYPERLINK "<http://www.earlyamerica.com>"

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BYU Studies, Volume 22, 1982, Number 3 – Summer 1982, Joseph Smith and the Manchester (New York) Library by Robert Paul, entry number 13-14 for the *History* and 19 for the *Life of George Washington*.

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