
“Foolish Stories Were Published”

D&C 45: Introduction

In prefacing this revelation, the Prophet Joseph Smith stated, “At this age of the Church many false reports and foolish stories were published and circulated, to prevent people from investigating the work or embracing the faith.”¹

The first falsehoods printed by someone who had been a member of the Church and left the faith were the writings of Ezra Booth. In a series of articles printed in the *Ohio Star* in Ravenna, Ohio, Booth tried to justify his reasons for leaving the Church by claiming that Joseph Smith had received a false prophecy and there were inconsistencies in Church teachings. Booth also complained of Joseph Smith’s lack of sobriety, prudence, and stability.

Although the writings of Ezra Booth put into circulation false reports and foolish stories, it was the editorials of E. D. Howe in the *Painesville Telegraph* that caused the greatest damage. Howe printed more disparaging articles against the Church, the Prophet Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon than any other Ohio newspaperman. He personally authored only a few of the disparaging articles, but he willingly accepted for publication critical articles against the Church. Some of the articles were reprinted in other Ohio publications which caused even the honest in heart to avoid embracing the faith.

E. D. Howe began his publishing career in Painesville, Ohio, on July 16, 1822, when he founded the *Painesville Telegraph*. As the printer lifted the first sheet off the type in the dingy shop on Main Street in Painesville, Ohio, he turned to E. D. Howe and said, “Well, Eber, I

¹ History, 1838–1856, volume A-1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834], Document Transcript. Joseph Smith Papers.

guess we've started." At the time, the paper had five paid subscribers and two advertisements. E. D. Howe was ambitious and before long he had hundreds of subscribers.

Howe was curious about Joseph Smith and the Church even before the prophet arrived in Kirtland, Ohio. On January 11, 1831, he wrote to William W. Phelps in Canandaigua, New York, requesting information about Mormonism. Two months later, on March 12, he published a letter from unidentified persons in Palmyra "on the subject of Bible imposture." As time went on, E. D. Howe published more articles about what he called "Mormonism," referring to members of the Church as "fanatics," "a gang of deluded mortals," "deluded beings," the "dregs of this community," and "profound believers in witchcraft, ghosts, and goblins." He referred to the Prophet Joseph Smith as "Jo," "Joe," and "Joey" and the Book of Mormon as the "golden bible." Revelations recorded by Joseph Smith, he called "volumes of ... trash."²

On January 31, 1834, E. D. Howe's *Painesville Telegraph* printed a public notice to "take measures to avert the evils which threaten the Public by the location in this vicinity, of Joseph Smith Jun." These measures included funding Doctor Hurlbut's attempts to defame Joseph Smith and provide an alternative explanation for the origin of the Book of Mormon. E. D. Howe denounced Joseph Smith and Mormonism in his 1834 publication *Mormonism Unveiled*.³

The following year, on January 30, 1835, E. D. Howe sold the *Painesville Telegraph* to his younger brother Asahel Howe for \$600. He retained some financial interest in the newspaper until 1839, when the paper was sold to Lewis Rice and Philander Winchester.

² Taken from a series of articles printed between 1831–1834 in the *Painesville Telegraph*.

³ See Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2015).