

**George M. Hinkle:
Mormons' Benedict Arnold**
by Michael DeGroot
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**George March Hinkle
Mormon Friend or Foe?**

George M. Hinkle was the LDS Church's own Benedict Arnold. As the colonel of the Mormon-controlled Caldwell County militia in 1838, Hinkle made a secret deal to hand over his own leaders, including the prophet Joseph Smith, to their sworn enemies. In recent years some historians have tried to rehabilitate Hinkle's reputation — arguing that his motives were to prevent bloodshed between the Mormons and non-Mormons in Missouri. But 19th-century legal documents purchased at a public auction last month tell a story that confirms Hinkle's darker motives.

Jeffrey N. Walker spoke about the legal cases of Joseph Smith, on Friday at the University of Utah LDS institute during the J. Reuben Clark Law Society's annual conference. Walker, assistant managing editor for the Joseph Smith Papers project, said he was present at the auction at Spink Shreves Galleries in New York City on Jan. 28 (2010) when the 24 documents of Smith vs. Hinkle were purchased for the LDS Church. His discussion of the lawsuit at the conference was the first public announcement of the contents of this previously unknown legal case. The lawsuit's roots began when Hinkle sold his Far West, Mo., home to LDS Presiding Bishop Edward Partridge and moved to De Witt, Mo. Partridge later sold it to Joseph Smith. Joseph and his family were living in Hinkle's old home when the Missouri militia arrested Joseph. After Hinkle delivered Joseph Smith to the state militia, Joseph was almost executed — but General Alexander W. Doniphan refused to carry out the orders.

Hinkle betrayed Joseph on Nov. 1, 1838. The documents testify that on that same winter day, Hinkle came back to his old home and kicked Joseph's wife and children out of the house. He took the household belongings, furniture, books and clothing. Hinkle also took Joseph's horse, saddle and bridle. Emma came in tears with her children to the home of Lucinda Harris. Harris testified that Hinkle came by and threatened Emma again and told her to "leave the country." Hinkle sold

Joseph's horse, saddle and bridle to Samuel Bogart, the head of the non-Mormon Ray County Missouri State Militia.

A month later the prisoners were being transferred to Liberty Jail. Joseph saw Bogart riding on a horse with Joseph's saddle. Bogart told him he had sold the horse to someone named Wilson, but that he would be willing to buy it back for Joseph for \$200. Bogart wouldn't give up the saddle, however. He wanted to keep it as a souvenir.

Hinkle was excommunicated from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Quincy, Ill., in March 1839. He later moved to Iowa Territory — across the river from Nauvoo, Ill., and started his own church, the Church of Jesus Christ, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife.

The lawsuit against Hinkle came later, in August 1841, more than two years after Joseph had escaped his captors in Missouri. Joseph sued Hinkle to recover the cost of the stolen items. Several people testified that Joseph's captors told Hinkle they were going to kill Joseph. Hinkle believed he would be "safe" in taking the property. Walker said this response changes the perspective on Hinkle's motivation. He knew he was likely delivering Joseph Smith to his death and profited from the event. Joseph won the case, but was awarded only \$200 — the value of the horse, saddle and bridle. The record did not have testimony of third parties about the other things that were stolen, according to Walker.

The purchased documents are one of the most complete sets of documents from any of the more than 200 legal cases Joseph Smith was involved in over his life-

George M. Hinkle



Was the Prophet Joseph Smith betrayed or spared by Colonel George M. Hinkle at Far West?

time, Walker said. “These documents are a fascinating addition to understanding Joseph’s legal entanglements and show him as a plaintiff not just a defendant,” Walker said. “Most of Joseph’s cases have him as the defendant.”

According to Walker, the purchased documents were being picked up from the Dallas office of Spink Shreves Galleries at about the time he was speaking at the conference Friday morning. He said the case documents will be included as part of the legal series in the Joseph Smith Papers. The church is also making plans to make these and other auction documents available soon.

“The church acquiring them allows them to be in the public,” Walker said. “There is nothing secret in them.”

LETTER OF G. M. HINKLE

Messenger and Advocate

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

August 1, 1845

Buffalo, Scott County, Indian Territory

August 14, 1844.

TO W. W. Phelps, Esq.,
Nauvoo, Illinois.

My Dear Sir: After so long a time, I take up my pen to address a few lines to you, and thus break that perfect silence which has existed between us ever since we parted in Far West, Missouri, in the fall of 1838. Then you and I were both dissenters from the church of Latter Day Saints, though we did not dissent upon exactly the

same principles; for I only dissented from the unwise, unhallowed management of the heads or authorities of the church, and not from any true points of doctrine which I ever had believed. But you said to me that you dissented from the whole Mormon system. Since then I have been told by good authority, such as Hyrum Smith and others, that you have returned to the bosom of the church, and been received again to fellowship, and all seems to be well with you. If you are happy in the course you are now taking, all I have now to say to you is, at the tribunal of heaven you will have to answer for all your deeds done in the body.

But, sir, there is one point upon which I wish to address the Latter Day Saints through you, in order that the honest-hearted and ignorant-minded may be corrected, and the malicious-hearted slanderers put to shame. It has been the theme of many, since I left Missouri, to calumniate and vilify me for the course which I, as the acting colonel of the militia of Caldwell, pursued in the surrender of the citizens of Far West, Caldwell, etc., to the authorities of Missouri. Those vilifiers have stated it, and vociferated its repetition throughout the length and breadth of our happy land, and the newspapers of the day have thrown it upon the wings of the wind, and no doubt it has gone to the Old World, and there been listened to and credited-especially by those of your faith-that I, as a base wretch, after having the confidence of the church, yet in that critical moment of their perils in Missouri, when they in and of Far West were besieged by between three and four thousand men-the story is, that I, there and then, betrayed 'the heads of the church' into the hands of the military authorities of Missouri, and that, too, for a large sum of money. And then, as if they intended to heap disgrace upon me, after insult and injury, they say I turned state's evidence against them; also that I informed on many of the citizens of Far West and had them arrested and delivered up to the court of inquiry to be punished. And many such like reports have been put in circulation by my enemies to do me injury; all of which, before God, I declare to be as false as Satan himself. Now, sir, you are the man who knows more about it than any other man belonging to your church. You know that you, John Corrill, A. Morrison, and myself, were appointed by Joseph Smith to go and confer with the commanding officers of the Mis-



**Joseph Smith rebuking the guards
while in chains at Richmond, Missouri**
painting by Liz Lemon Swindle

souri militia, and effect a treaty if possible, on any terms short of a battle. You know that we went and risked our lives with a white flag, when only a few hours previous the bearer of one (Charles Rich) had been fired at on the [450] same field; and we did this to obey the order or request of Joseph .Smith. Our object was (at least I felt so) to prevent the effusion of blood, which we all saw must inevitably take place unless something could be done immediately. Were you not present, sir, at that trying scene when the eyes of our enemies seemed to flash fire when we approached, and I received from the hand of Major General Lucas that unhallowed paper, narrating to us the terms upon which the lives of our families and friends could be saved, viz: "Give up your leaders-your principal men-as hostages to be tried by civil law. Give up all your arms of defense, and all leave the State forthwith." He also read to us that generous-no, that execrable-order of Governor Boggs, authorizing him to exterminate us, or drive us from the State. Now, sir, I appeal to your candor: Did I, at this critical moment, say to General Lucas, or to any of those with him, "Give me a sum of money [Judas like] and I will comply"? If you answer in the affirmative, then query, Were you and the others of the delegation to go partners with me in such an unhallowed speculation?

What! Thus to betray our friends-our brethren-into the hands of their implacable enemies in the hour of their peril-and that, too, for Missouri gold!!!! Or if I did, as has been reported by men high in authority among you, winked at by all, and not contradicted by any-at least so far as I know-did I take the price and snugly lodge it all in my own pocket, without dividing with any of you? You know I did not make that treaty alone. Nay, you well remember that yourself and the others with us, by authority or request of Joseph Smith himself, agreed to the disgraceful terms. We then urged all to submit. But did I not then and there oppose that part of the order requiring us to give up our arms and immediately leave the State, urging that if any had offended by breaking the law, we were willing and even anxious that such should be punished to the extent of justice, or the magnitude of the crime, but to give up our arms and leave the State, would be virtually throwing away our most sacred rites as citizens of a republican state, and that we would as soon give up our lives? Did he not become enraged and say that Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, P. P. Pratt, and G. W. Robinson must be given up, and no other terms would do? Did he not give us half an hour to consult our friends? When the facts were laid before Joseph, did he not say, "I will go"; and did not the others go with him, and that, too, voluntarily, so far as you and I were concerned?

My understanding was that those men were to be taken and kept till next morning as hostages; and if they did not, upon reflection and consultation with the officers in the camp of the enemy, during the night, conclude to accept of the terms proposed to us, but choose to fight, then they were to be kept safely, and returned to us in the city next morning, unharmed, and time given us to prepare for an attack by the militia.

During this whole interview and transaction, were not thousands of troops drawn up near the city, ready to fall upon us, provided those demanded as hostages refused to go? And when Smith and the others had given up, without any compulsory measures from us, did not General Lucas demand our arms, but on reflection agree to let us retain them till next day, inasmuch as it was then about sunset? Were we not advised next day, by word sent expressly from Joseph Smith to us, to surrender? When that intelligence was received, did I not



Joseph Smith was incarcerated in the Liberty Jail from December 1, 1838 to April 6, 1839
painting by Liz Lemon Swindle

draw up the forces under my command, and explain to them the nature of the whole affair, and then request all who were in favor of surrendering, to make it known by marching three paces forward? They made a very slow start, but finally all came forward. We then marched out with slow and solemn step into a partial hollow square of the enemy, faced inward, grounded arms, and marched away and left them. The town was laid under martial law and guarded. Then the authorities commenced taking others as prisoners, and kept them under guard to be tried, as they said, by civil law. No man ever knew me to complain of, or inform on any one. Uniformly when questioned by those seeking victims, I told them that all I knew to be guilty of breaking the law had fled from the city the night before the surrender. When the court of inquiry held its session in Richmond, I did not turn state's evidence, but was legally subpoenaed, as you know.



**During the winter of 1839 over 8,000 Saints
were driven from Missouri.
Emma Smith crossed the frozen
Mississippi River on foot February 1839
painting by Liz Lemon Swindle**

Therefore, as to my course of conduct there, even under trying circumstances, while retrospectively I have no cause of regret. And during the time I was a member of that church, before God and all men I have a clear conscience, and am willing to give an account of my course at any time. While I lived in that church I tried to live in peace; and when I left it, I did not leave in order to persecute it, but to get from under the priestly influence of those men who bore down upon those who opposed their views, with an iron rule; with a yoke too intolerable for a high-minded man, or a humble Christian spirit to bear.

Past experience had already shown me that as soon as anyone, but especially one of note among them, would leave them, he must suffer all kinds of abuse. The motto was, "His character must be ruined, or he will injure us."

And in return, the dissenters have said, "Down with the heads of the church." And I know that they have sometimes used base means, and published many falsehoods, and brought much persecution on you.

This has not been my course. I despise the course which both parties have pursued. I am for peace and for truth, and truth only on all subjects. Notwithstanding the many slanders that have been afloat about me, in order to injure and ruin me, this is the first scrap that I have ever published on the subject; and I have written and published this out of mere necessity, in self-defense. I have hitherto been determined, let them say what they would or could, I would bear it, and leave the event with God.

Almost six years have rolled away since I withdrew my labors and influence from among that people; and notwithstanding my reserve, some of them still continue to roll down their Satanic falsehoods upon me. I have been informed that one of your number is now in an adjoining neighborhood to this, asserting that I sold the heads of the church, in Missouri, for \$700.

Now, sir, as you are the man who was engaged in the whole affair with me, I request that you write a letter for publication, and either put in the Times and Seasons, or send it to me; and in it exempt me from those charges, and correct the minds of that people and the public on this subject; for you know that they are as base as the blackness of darkness, and as false as Satan himself.

If I felt to retaliate or to do as other dissenters have done, I might publish much, and do it in truth, about the wickedness of that people, and it might add to the already exasperated state of feeling now existing against them; but, sir, that is not my purpose. I feel, and always have, to leave them in the hands of God, and to mind my own business; and I assure you I find enough to do to attend strictly to my own duty; therefore, write and exhort your brethren "to go and do likewise."

Very respectfully,
Your friend and well-wisher,
G. M. Hinkle.

Source:
<https://worldconnect.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=lorias&id=I23210>