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The Theater in Mormon Life and Culture

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LEONARD J. ARRINGTON
MORMON HISTORY LECTURE SERIES
No. 4

THE THEATER
IN
MORMON LIFE AND CULTURE

by
Howard R. Lamar

December 1, 1998

Sponsored by

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Introduction

F. Ross Peterson

The establishment of a lecture series honoring a library's special collection and a donor to that collection is unique. Utah State University's Merrill Library houses the personal and historical collection of Leonard J. Arrington, a renowned scholar of the American West. As part of Arrington's gift to the university, he requested that the university's historical collection become the focus for an annual lecture on an aspect of Mormon history. Utah State agreed to the request and in 1995 inaugurated the annual Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series.

Utah State's Special Collections and Archives is ideally suited as the host for the lecture series. The state's land grant institution began collecting agricultural and economic records very early, but in the 1960s became a major depository for Mormonabilia. Utah is unique in that one religion dominated the historical evolution of the state. Leonard Arrington, accompanied by his wife Grace Fort, joined the USU faculty in 1946 and along with S. George Ellsworth, Joel Ricks, and Milton C. Abrams focused on gathering original Mormon diaries, journals, and letters for the library. Professional archivists were hired and the concept of "special collections" was born at Utah State University.

In many ways, Leonard Arrington profited from this vision. Trained as an economist at the University of North Carolina, Arrington became an economic historian of international repute. Each month, Arrington and Ellsworth met with Eugene Campbell and Wendell Rich and presented their ideas on specific historical topics. Arrington, a native of Twin Falls, Idaho, published *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints* in 1958. Utilizing the available collections and always seeking additional material, Arrington and his associates made Utah State University their base as they embarked on numerous publishing and editorial ventures.

They helped organize both the Western History Association and the Mormon History Association. They followed the professional organizations with the creation of journals such as the *Journal of Mormon History*, *Dialogue*, and the *Western Historical Quarterly*. The *Quarterly* has been edited at Utah State University since its inception twenty-five years ago. In fact, Arrington and Ellsworth were the first editors. Their idea was to provide new alternatives and opportunities for young scholars of the West in general and the Mormon West in particular.

Arrington began writing biographies and institutional histories during the 1960s. He fostered careers, encouraged students, and employed many as researchers. His studies of Charles C. Rich, William Spry, and David Eccles illustrate this phase of his endeavors. At the same time, he also finished histories of the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company and of Kennecott Copper. Arrington's role as researcher, writer, founder, editor, nourisher, and friend continued to blossom.

His reward was an appointment as LDS church historian in 1973, a position he held for ten years. Simultaneously, Arrington assumed the newly created Lemuel Redd Chair of Western History at Brigham Young University. Arrington's focus became exclusively Mormon history and he attempted to create an atmosphere of open professional research. The church allowed him to hire a number of historians to work on special projects and assignments. Mormon history flourished during his tenure as historian and his own career was enhanced by the publication of *The Mormon Experience*, co-authored with Davis Bitton, and *American Moses: A Biography of Brigham Young*.

In 1981, Arrington and his staff moved to BYU full-time and established the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of History. He continued to publish and mentor other prospective historians. Since retirement, he has published the monumental two-volume *History of Idaho* as well as numerous biographies of such western figures as Harold Silver and Charlie Redd. Widowed, he married Harriet Horne during this period and she became his travel companion as well as an active partner in his research and writings. They chose to deposit their vast collection of primary material as well as their library at Utah State University. Thus the Leonard J. Arrington Historical Archives in Special Collections and Archives was established.

A Note on the Author

Clyde A. Milner II

*T*he Leonard Arrington Lecture is named in honor of one of the most beloved and respected historians of the American West. Few can equal Leonard in the way he has won both the hearts and minds of multiple generations of students, scholars, readers, and listeners. Nonetheless, if there is an individual who can approach Leonard Arrington's status as one of the most widely respected and warmly appreciated historians of the American West, my personal nominee would be Howard Lamar. I am, however, not an unbiased judge. I became a historian of the American West because I became one of Howard Lamar's students. All of this happened in the early 1970s in the now distant, trans-Mississippi East where I did my doctoral studies at Yale University. I did not come to Yale to study the American West, and, in fact, I don't think I had ever read a serious book about the American West until my first semester at Yale. That is when I read what is still one of the very best books ever written about this region, Leonard Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*. It may indeed be that Leonard's magnificent scholarship started pushing me ever so slightly westward, but it was Howard Lamar who finally and firmly set me on my western journey. I could not have asked for a better guide, teacher, and friend.

Of course, while I studied at Yale, I became familiar with Howard's scholarship. By the early 1970s, he had already redefined the study of the territorial era of the American West with his two books, *Dakota Territory* (1956) and *The Far Southwest* (1966) which looked at New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and Utah. But by my time at Yale, he had pushed on to comparative frontier studies, directing a wonderful seminar that examined South Africa and North America, and he was at work producing *The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West* (1977). In some ways, I missed Howard's glory years at Yale. He would have

many more, and much better, graduate students than I. He continued to teach one of Yale's most famous and popular undergraduate courses, a year-long survey of the History of the American West that went from Spanish exploration to the present day. From 1979 to 1985, Howard was dean of Yale College, which meant that he oversaw Yale's entire undergraduate program, and in 1992-93 he served as president of Yale. During this period he also became Sterling Professor of History, perhaps the most prestigious academic appointment at the university. Despite his present emeritus status, he has not stopped being a remarkably productive scholar. The clearest proof is the publication of the magnificent *New Encyclopedia of the American West* (1998), which now sets the standard for reference works on the West.

To read Howard Lamar's writings or to listen to his public speeches is a constant source of enlightenment for me. I have known Howard Lamar for more than a quarter of a century, and I still am learning from him. It seems only proper that one of Yale and America's best teachers has been selected to present the fourth Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture.

THE THEATER IN MORMON LIFE AND CULTURE

It is a great honor to be invited to deliver, in 1998, the fourth annual Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture. I have known Professor Arrington for more than forty years and I have always admired his scholarship, have frequently sought his advice, and have always treasured his friendship. For me, he is the senior ranking Western historian alive today, the most distinguished historian writing about the Mormon past, and a leading authority on Utah's history in this century.¹ His *Great Basin Kingdom* set a new benchmark for fine scholarship for Mormon religious, political, economic, and social history.² Indeed, whatever subject one turns to he seems to have written about it.

Thus you can understand why, after accepting the invitation to give the Arrington Lecture I found myself facing a terrible problem: what could I speak about that Leonard had not written about? After much

In the preparation of this lecture I have become indebted to a number of individuals for their valuable assistance, chief among them Jeremy Mumford, a doctoral candidate in American history at Yale University, who identified and reported on Mormon newspaper accounts of the Salt Lake Theater and in the Bienecke Rare Book and Manuscripts Library at Yale University, and to Murray Biggs, associate professor of English and theater studies, Yale University. I am also grateful to Mrs. Harriet Arrington for copies of her own articles pertaining to theater in Utah, and to Dr. Everett L. Cooley who has graciously provided me with copies of materials pertaining to the history of theater in the University of Utah Marriott Library.

1. This paper is published as presented by Professor Lamar before the death of Leonard Arrington on February 11, 1999.

2. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

searching I thought I had identified a safe topic when I discovered that at the time of Utah's admission as a state in 1896, both Utah's delegate, George Q. Cannon, Jr., and incoming Governor Heber M. Wells, both fantastic speakers, had been fine amateur actors for many years in Salt Lake City and that a previous territorial delegate, John T. Caine, had been both an actor and manager of the Salt Lake Theater for several decades. Moreover, Hiram Clawson, Caine's fellow actor and co-manager of the Salt Lake Theater, was not only successful in those two roles, but was the first superintendent of ZCMI.

There have been many bad actors in politics, but these four men were both good actors and good politicians. Surely, I thought, the role of the theater in Mormon life and culture might have escaped Leonard's attention. But to my dismay, in my first day of research on the topic, I picked up his *Brigham Young, American Moses* and there on pages 288 to 93 Leonard had summarized the history of Brigham Young and the Salt Lake Theater in a brilliant, truly insightful way.³ No, ladies and gentlemen, one should never assume Leonard does not know everything.

Then, to add to my dismay, Harriet Arrington, Leonard's wife, emerged as the author of an excellent biographical sketch of Maud May Babcock, the founder of the Speech and Drama Department at the University of Utah, whom Harriet had known.⁴ If in the course of my remarks you see Professor and Mrs. Arrington smiling and nodding knowingly as I make a point, consider that as a clue that I am on the right track, because I will be paraphrasing their writing. I should also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to Myrtle E. Henderson, whose *A History of the Theater in Salt Lake City from 1850 to 1870* I found invaluable.⁵

3. Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 288–93. Biographies of Cannon, Wells, Caine, and Clawson may be found in Andrew Jensen, *Latter-day Saints Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Jensen History, 1901–36).

4. Letter, Harriet Arrington to Howard Lamar, Salt Lake City, September 29, 1998; and “Maud May Babcock,” typescript of biographical entry in Ann Commire, ed., *Women in World History: A Biographical Encyclopedia* (Yorkin Publications, 1999).

5. Myrtle E. Henderson, *A History of the Theatre in Salt Lake City, from 1850 to 1870* (Privately published, Evanston, Ill., July 1934). Two unpublished studies provide information beyond 1870: Roberta Reese Asahina, “Brigham Young and the Salt Lake Theater, 1862–1877” (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 1980), and Francis Therold Todd, “Operation of the Salt Lake Theater, 1862–1875” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1973).

The role of the theater in society, for Western civilization at least, goes back, of course, to the Greeks and Romans, the ruins of whose impressive amphitheaters we visit as tourists today. We continue to read, produce, and attend the plays of the great Greek and Roman playwrights. Curiously, theater in northern Europe had a very different beginning, and is associated with the Christian religion. The classical theater tradition with buildings or amphitheaters did not move to Europe in medieval times. Rather, theater consisted of biblical scenes enacted first in church or cathedral altar areas. Soon, however, the performers were exiled from the church—so plays were performed outside—and eventually to market squares on feast days.⁶

Murray Biggs, associate professor of English and theater studies at Yale University, tells me that one of the first scenes enacted was set at the tomb of Christ with someone saying to Mary and others: “Whom do you seek?” These biblical scenes eventually became the medieval mystery plays in France and England. Although scenery became a vital part of these plays, there was never a theater in the modern sense. Indeed, often the mystery plays moved from town to town via wagons.⁷

The concept of theater in a building came in Renaissance Italy and almost independently in England with performances in inn courtyards that evolved into the Globe and other theaters. To make my first point, theater in Utah has its origins in English theater, and it is no accident that one of the inspirations for the Salt Lake Theater was the Drury Lane Theater in London. Built in 1862, the Salt Lake Theater attempted to imitate at least in its ornate interior the design of the famous London playhouse. As various historians of the Salt Lake Theater have observed, William H. Folsom, an English architect from London who admired the Drury Lane playhouse, aided in designing the interior of the building while on a visit to Salt Lake.⁸

6. Oscar Brockett, *History of the Theatre*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1974), 365–430.

7. Interview with Murray Biggs, November 5, 1998, Yale University, New Haven.

8. References to William H. Folsom may be found in Henderson, *Theatre in Salt Lake City*, 48; John S. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre, or the History of Theatricals in Utah* (Salt Lake City: Century Printing, 1905), 23.

Before we talk about the justly famous Salt Lake Theater, let us go to Nauvoo, Illinois, where Joseph Smith built a “fun house” for performances and dancing. Like Brigham Young, Smith believed his followers must have time for leisure and entertainment.⁹

What is more remarkable, George J. Adams, a young convert to Mormonism, traveled up to Philadelphia in the early 1840s on a mission. While there he persuaded his brother-in-law, 35-year-old actor Thomas A. Lyne, to consider Mormonism seriously. Not only was Philadelphia the site of the first regular theater in America, Lyne himself had played with the famous actors Edwin Forrest and the elder, Junius Brutus, Booth.¹⁰

Always a curious and active man, Lyne journeyed to Nauvoo to visit the Mormons. Once there he quickly befriended Joseph Smith and was soon producing plays, among them a powerful drama by Richard Brinsley Sheridan called *Pizarro* (1799) in which Pizarro’s brutal conquest of the noble Incas in Peru is recounted. In the play the tragic Indian hero is Rolla, who sacrifices his life to save his best friend Alonzo and Alonzo’s wife, Cora, and their child from the vindictive acts of *Pizarro*, who not only wanted to rule Peru but to kill Alonzo, the logical heir to the Incan throne.¹¹

I would submit that no play could have pleased Joseph Smith and the Mormons more, for it was a paean against injustice, it defended family values to the hilt, and although Rolla is killed, Pizarro is assassinated, Alonzo and his family survive. For a fledgling religious sect having already experienced persecution in Missouri, it was a most appropriate play. In the Nauvoo performance, Brigham Young played the High Priest who blessed Rolla. Thomas A. Lyne, the actor, who later broke with the Mormons but came to perform in the Salt Lake

9. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre*, 4.

10. *Ibid.*, 4–7, 28–30.

11. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *Pizarro. A Tragedy in Five Acts* (London: Printed for J. Ridgway, 1799). The play was taken from the German drama, *Die Spanier in Peru*, of August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue and adapted to the English stage by Sheridan. An incredibly prolific dramatist, Kotzebue wrote over two hundred plays, some of which were staged by the Salt Lake Theater. Kotzebue’s fame was such that probably no Mormon on a mission to western Europe would not have been aware of his works.

Theater in 1862, jokingly observed that Young had been playing the role of High Priest ever since.¹²

That the theater was not just a casual interest of Joseph Smith is attested to by Horace G. Whitney's account that when Thomas A. Lyne was in Nauvoo, Smith told him: "Here's a boy who is clever at mimicry. I wish you would give him a chance." The boy was Hiram Clawson, who then appeared in *Pizarro* and was later to act in hundreds of plays in Salt Lake while serving as co-manager of the Salt Lake Theater for many years with John T. Caine.¹³ Meanwhile we must not ignore Lyne's powerful influence on early theatrical tastes. While at Nauvoo he played in *William Tell*, *Virginus*, *Damon and Pythius*, and *Pizarro*, all plays that the Salt Lake Theater was to present over and over again for more than four decades.¹⁴ But the point is that from the beginning of the Church of the Latter-day Saints theater, music and dance were part of its members' lives. Professor Biggs argues, in fact, that any society with elaborate ritual in the practice of its religion will have a healthy counterpart in secular drama.¹⁵

The trek to Utah in 1847 was so demanding no one could think of theater. By 1850, however, a group, The Deseret Dramatic Association, had formed, inspired, John Lindsay says, by members of the Nauvoo Brass Band. The group began performances in the Old Bowery, originally a brush arbor hall for both religious and social events. The first play performed was *Robert Macaire* in which Hiram Clawson joined with two fine amateur actors, James Ferguson and the delightful and flexible comedian Phillip Margetts, a blacksmith by trade, and with Horace Whitney, who had gotten his first taste of theater at Nauvoo. There were three women in the cast, Mrs. Oran, Margaret Judd, and Miss May Badlam. Miss Judd soon married Clawson and was, according to Myrtle

12. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre*, 6.

13. Horace G. Whitney, *The Drama in Utah: The Story of the Salt Lake Theatre* (Salt Lake City: *The Deseret News*, 1915), 4.

14. An "Inventory of Salt Lake Theatre Posters" printed between 1862 and 1868, in the George Dollinger Pyper Collection in the Marriott Library, University of Utah, confirms the large number of repeated performances of favorite plays. A list of the most popular plays is also provided in Arrington, *Young: American Moses*, 293.

15. Murray Biggs, Interview, November 5, 1998.

E. Henderson, for many years a favorite local comedienne.¹⁶ Horace G. Whitney, son of the pioneer Horace K., recalled that “Among my earliest memories of my father are those of seeing him in our apple orchard, walking back and forth with a manuscript in his hand, committing his parts to memory.”¹⁷

The Deseret Dramatic Association argued from the first that having a theater proved that the Mormons were cultural and educated. Years later others argued that plays inform people who were not otherwise well educated about history and morality. This assertion has been repeated over and over again down to the present. Indeed, Professor Murray Biggs informs me that Queen Elizabeth, although head of the English church, approved theater in London because it not only provided entertainment, it was a sort of release from tensions. And given Shakespeare’s and Ben Jonson’s historical dramas, people were certainly given a sense of history.¹⁸

By 1852 the Salt Lake drama group had moved to a more permanent building, Social Hall, located on State Street. Here indeed was something extraordinary for a frontier town: the forty by eighty foot building had a slanted floor and a level basement area for dances. The actors placed a bust of Shakespeare above the stage.¹⁹

The Deseret Dramatic Association displayed a sophistication in public relations that we must admire. The favorite *Pizarro* appears to have been one of the first plays acted in Social Hall, in 1853 with James Ferguson in the title role of Rolla, the tragic Incan hero. Other sources argue that Bulwer-Lytton’s remarkably effective play, *The Lady of Lyons*, which was also performed in 1853, was actually the first play performed in Social Hall.

Whatever the case, the viewers knew *Pizarro* was a heavy drama full of violence and death. To relieve the tension, the Associates also performed a farce on the same night, a comedy called *The Irish Lion*. This

16. Henderson, *Theatre in Salt Lake City*, 19.

17. Whitney, *The Drama in Utah*, 35.

18. Murray Biggs, Interview, November 5, 1998.

19. The Social Hall stage and auditorium are described in Henderson, *Theatre in Salt Lake City*, 27. The unbounded Mormon admiration for William Shakespeare is captured in John S. Lindsay’s claim that “Shakespeare was the most transcendent genius our earth has ever produced.” Lindsay, *Mormons and the Theatre*, 178.

combination of tragedy and comedy was to be a device followed by the Salt Lake Theater throughout the nineteenth century. In addition, a song or a dance was performed between the acts.²⁰ In many ways the Salt Lake players anticipated the coming of burlesque and vaudeville which swept American theaters after the Civil War.

If one were to ask who were the favorite playwrights whose works were performed in Salt Lake, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton would win hands down. This incredibly prolific English author produced an unending series of popular historical novels, such as *The Last Days of Pompeii*, as well as plays from the 1830s to the 1850s. Three powerful plays written in 1838, 1839, and 1840, *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu*, and *Money*, respectively, were performed over and over again in Salt Lake City.²¹

Although the Mormon War of 1857 had disrupted the activities of the old Deseret Dramatic Association, by 1859 the indefatigable

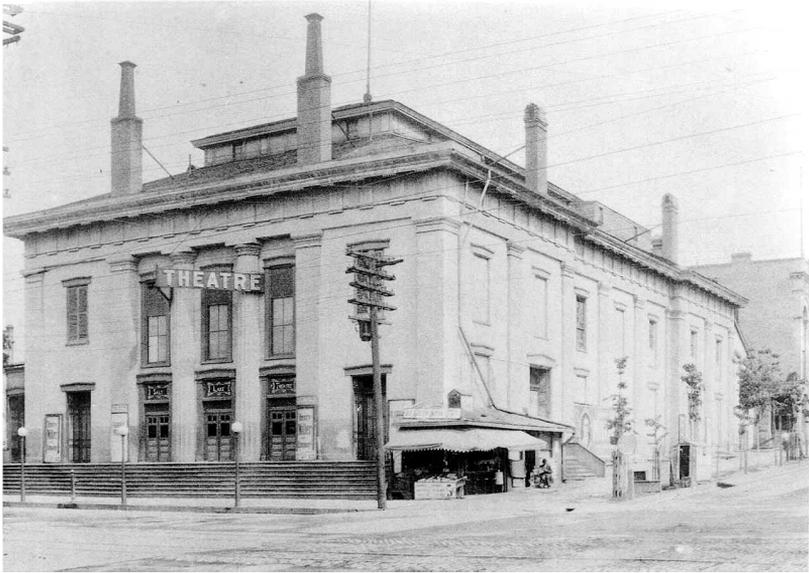
20. Two theatrical announcements in the *Deseret News* amply illustrate the usual combination of a serious play, interacts, and a farce.

Theatrical. The Management announces for this evening the fine play of "Damon and Pythias," or The Test of Friendship, in which Mr. T.A. Lyne will appear as Damon. Mr. Lyne is a professional actor and since he has been in this city, in the capacity of an instructor, has very successfully gained the good opinion and kind sentiments of those which whom he has been in prof. Relationship. Mrs. A. Lynch's second appearance in a popular sentimental song will doubtless give satisfaction to the patrons of the theatre. The laughable farce "The Secret, or The Hole in the wall" is also announced for the after-piece. *Deseret News*, February 11, 1863.

Fall season opens 10/3. 5 act "Thrilling American comedy—Señor Valiente." "Some of the 'old favorites' among the ladies are necessarily unable to appear on the first night, as the Comedy is too lengthy to admit of concluding with a farce. *Ibid.*, September 30, 1863.

It should be noted that the *Deseret News* carried theatrical notices from the time of the opening of the Salt Lake Theater in March, 1862. See especially the coverage from 1862 through 1868. The *Deseret Evening News* continued the coverage, but by the 1880s coverage was briefer and more casual, often reporting on lectures at the theater rather than plays. The anti-Mormon *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* also carried theatrical notices, as well as reports on plays and players in New York or as they were touring the country.

21. Bulwer-Lytton, Edward George Earle Lytton (1803–1973), English novelist, dramatist, and politician, was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, and a member of Parliament for fifteen years. He produced *The Lady of Lyons* in 1838, a play in which the famous actor George Macready was a great success in the Covent Garden premiere. See Charles H. Shattuck, ed., *Bulwer and Macready: A Chronicle of Early Victorian Theatre* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), and James L. Campbell, Sr., *Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986). See also Bulwer-Lytton, *The Lady of Lyons, or Love and Pride* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1931, Piccadilly, 1851).



The Salt Lake Theater. Courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University.

Phillip Margetts organized and managed a new group: the Mechanics Dramatic Association. They performed in an unfinished private home owned by the Bowring family, and so it came to be called the Bowring Theater. Again we must admire the sophisticated public relations of the organizers. Having performed a delightful comedy, *The Honeymoon*, they asked Brigham Young and his entire family and friends to attend a special performance. Young liked the play and, as a result, is said to have been persuaded by Margetts to build the Salt Lake Theater.²²

Here I rely on Leonard Arrington's intriguing account of how the building of the theater was financed. Young gave Hiram Clawson \$4,000 to buy army surplus goods from Colonel Albert Sydney Johnston at Camp Floyd. The goods were resold to Salt Lake residents for \$40,000. Young then borrowed from a fund he had already set aside

22. Lindsay, *The Mormon and the Theatre*, 20–23.

to build a hall for the Seventies. Somehow he raised the \$100,000 it cost to construct the playhouse. Just how important this enterprise was to Young is suggested by the fact that of 183 direct employees under him, 20 were associated with the Sale Lake Theater.²³

The theater building was Grecian Doric in design on the outside and resembled, as noted earlier, London's famous Drury Lane Theater on the inside, with its four tiers of balconies, ornate gilt woodwork, and a magnificent chandelier said to have been designed and built by Brigham Young himself.²⁴ It is worth noting that William H. Folsom, the designer and builder of this magnificent fifteen hundred seat theater, the largest between St. Louis and San Francisco for decades, also built the Mormon Tabernacle.

The theater was opened with speeches and prayers in March 1862, and Hiram Clawson and John T. Caine were placed in charge and ran the theater for many years. It was an investment of Young's and he made sure it made a profit. Once again the tried and true formula of a serious play—Young initially forbade tragedies and Gentile actors—was followed by a farce. In the opening year, a play, *The Pride of the Market*, described as “a beautiful comedy,” was followed by a farce called *State Secrets*. According to the newspapers, in the inter-acts Miss Sara Alexander danced.²⁵ The biggest crisis came in 1866–67 when the actors, carpenters, and musicians said they could no longer work without pay—that the popularity of the theater took too much time from their regular jobs. Young argued with them, but in the end they were all given a salary.²⁶

Once again the continuities in the theater stood out. T. A. Lyne returned, after 20 years, to perform in *Pizarro*, in *Damon and Pythius*, and to play Shylock in the *Merchant of Venice*, as well as *William Tell*, which had been performed 20 years earlier at Nauvoo. Each play was followed by Irish farces and songs.

23. Arrington, *Young: American Moses*, 288ff.

24. Henderson, *The Theatre in Salt Lake City*, 48.

25. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre*, 23–26.

26. Arrington, *Young: American Moses*, 291–92.

Inevitably conditions in the theater began to change. Salt Lake Theater began to import famous actors to play lead roles. Meanwhile Hiram Clawson was wearing down Young's opposition to tragedies, and at least one local playwright, Edward W. Tullidge, had his play performed. After the coming of the railroad in 1869, operas and parodies of them were performed by traveling troupes.²⁷

By 1869, a playbill reads as follows:

Theater! Salt Lake City, U.T. ... Sixth appearance of the talented Howson opera, burlesque & comedy troupe. operetta! concert! extravaganza!! Saturday eve. June 5, '69. The performance will commence with Offenbach's comic opera, entitled, Pierette; or, La Rose St. Fleur! ... Concert of vocal gems! ... To conclude with, for the last time, the comical burlesque extravaganza, entitled Ill-treated il trovatore; or, The mother, maiden and musicianer ...²⁸

It is said that parody was a form of Mormon approval of theater. Certainly parodies were performed at many levels. In 1878 W. T. Harris, a son-in-law of Brigham Young, did a "colored lecture"—meaning in black face, burlesquing Henry Ward Beecher's sermons. In December, 1878, the *Daily Tribune* reported on a "Free Hutchinson concert at SLT." There was, reported the *Tribune*, "high appreciation of the family's generosity by frequent and rapturous applause." The audience particularly liked the song "Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm." The paper described it as a "true vein of Yankee generosity," that is, "mighty open-handed when it doesn't cost anything." And, added the *Tribune*, "it was terrifically applauded."²⁹

What is equally impressive was the range over space and in variety of form that theatrical performers took. Local dramatic clubs had formed in Provo, Springville, Ogden, Brigham City, and St. George. In October, 1878, the *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* reported that "Miss Susie

27. Henderson, *The Theatre and Salt Lake City*, 126; Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre*, 32, 87–108; and Whitney, *The Drama in Utah*, 35–41.

28. "Playbill" in Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven.

29. *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, December 13, 1878.

Spencer—is going on a professional tour through southern Utah, Nevada, Idaho and Montana, and will be accompanied by a troupe of theatrical people of this city.”³⁰

Concerning more local activities, the *Daily Tribune* reported that “The Salt Lake Amateur Dramatic Association gave a performance in the 11th ward schoolhouse tonight [of] *Nan, the Good for Nothing*. This company are furnishing the various wards of the city with their dramatic entertainments.” The *Tribune* wryly noted that the actors could have been better. Indeed, said the reviewers, “the majority might take any amount of polish and have room for more.”³¹

After Brigham Young’s death in 1877, the fare was often more a minstrel show or burlesque than not. As Myrtle Henderson has observed, the playbills now included such things as M. B. Leavitt’s European Novelties, Rice’s Burlesque, acrobats, and later, John Philip Sousa’s band.³² By the 1880s the variety was almost bewildering. When the competing Walker Opera House was built in the 1880s, the Salt Lake Theater felt so threatened it allowed a traveling burlesque show called “Adamless Eden” to be performed. This combined satirical comedy with sexy display of women’s legs—always in pink tights. The Gentile *Salt Lake Daily Tribune* reported that the audience was largely Latter-day elders, gamblers, and prostitutes and predicted that if it traveled to other Western cities it would be suppressed due to outraged public opinion.³³

Yet the commercialization of the Salt Lake Theater did not stifle local talent. A new generation of Mormon youths proved to be as stage struck as their elders had been. In 1872 a local youth, James A. McKnight, wrote a play called *The Robber of the Rockies* which he and friends got permission to perform in the Salt Lake Theater. The sons of Brigham Young, the Wellses, the Clawsons, and the Whitneys appear

30. *Ibid.*, October 23, 1878.

31. *Ibid.*, August 10, 1878.

32. Henderson, *The Theatre in Salt Lake City*, 105, 126ff. The coming of burlesque to America is well chronicled in Robert Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

33. *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, March 11 and 13, 1885.

to have performed in this production.³⁴ Meanwhile Salt Lake teenagers were enlisted as soldiers in *Macbeth*, as Indians in the play *Pocohantas*, and in *Pinafore*. Horace Whitney recalls that when Maude Adams's mother returned to Salt Lake to produce a play called *The Two Orphans*, Orson Whitney, Heber M. Wells, and John D. Spence were enlisted as extras.³⁵

This younger group, with others, formed the Home Dramatic Club and performed until 1894. In the process Horace Whitney reports that future governor Heber M. Wells progressed from comedy roles to those of leading men. Heber Wells's lifetime interest is suggested by the fact that he was still secretary of the Salt Lake Dramatic Association in 1915.³⁶

Amateur theatricals and recitals were an important activity for other young persons in the 1870s. In a single week a young Mormon man raised money for his mission with an evening of recitals and vocal and instrumental pieces in the twentieth ward school house. There was even a Gentile teenage minstrel troupe that gave performances.³⁷ The Thespian Association of the twenty-first ward performed "Ten Nights in a Bar Room."

Meanwhile the Latter-day Saints had been the critical subject of plays by Easterners that characterized them as either comic or villainous people. A play by Thomas Dunn English, *The Mormons, a Life in Salt Lake City*, produced in 1858, told how a New York alderman came to Salt Lake to reform the Mormons, but instead left the city with a gift of 13 wives! *Deseret Deserted, or the Last Days of Brigham Young* described Salt Lake City as "the paradise of Mahomet," identifying polygamy with Islamic plural marriage.³⁸ In a much harsher vein a play called *The Danites, or the Heart of the Sierra* (1877), by Alexander Fitzpatrick and the poet Joaquin Miller, suggested that the

34. Whitney, *The Drama in Utah*, 36–38.

35. *Ibid.*, 37–38.

36. *Ibid.*, 46–47.

37. *Deseret Evening News*, November 6 and 11, 1878, and *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, November 9, 1878.

38. See "Mormons in American Theatre and Drama," in Gerald Boardman, ed., *Oxford Companion to American Theatre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 186–87.

Mormons practiced murder and rapine. Generally speaking, however, portrayals in the East made Mormons comic figures right into the 1930s.³⁹

By the turn of the century amateur groups, who had played supporting roles when famous actors or actresses came to town, had been marginalized by traveling stock companies who brought entire casts and scenery with them. The Salt Lake Theater now paid royalty fees for using New York plays. George Dollinger Pyper, who, along with Phillip Margetts, was possibly the most popular and beloved actor and musician in the history of Salt Lake theater and served as one of the last directors of the Salt Lake Theater, was constantly involved in negotiating with New York theatrical syndicates such as Klaw and Erlanger and the Shuberts. This was now a big business, for in 1915 there were still fifteen hundred legitimate theaters operating outside of New York City.⁴⁰

If I might change my chronological narrative for a few moments, let me comment on the nature of the plays most frequently performed in the years 1850 to 1890 and on what role the Mormons thought theater played in their lives.

It has already been noted that both performers and citizens saw the theater as one of the truest signs of civilization a society could aspire to because it was educational as well as entertaining.

Second, virtually all of the plays performed emphasized the achievement of nobility through virtue. It was also the case that practically all of the popular plays featured kings and nobles, fancy costumes, and European hierarchy rather than themes of democracy and equalitarianism. The main theme, however, was the triumph of virtue.

39. *Ibid.*, 187.

40. See inventory of various letters and telegrams between George D. Pyper and Klaw and Erlanger, 1901–1911, and Pyper telegrams to Erlanger, Lee Shubert, Jules Murray, and the Shubert Booking Agency, August 2, 1928, announcing the closing of the Salt Lake Theater, in *Register of the Papers of George Dollinger Pyper*, Western Americana Department, University of Utah Libraries, Salt Lake City, 1970.

The third characteristic was love of comedy, burlesque, and vaudeville—the latter a family event which was popular by the end of the century. This was a theatrical-musical tradition that was popular not only in London but in the midlands, the area from which so many English Mormon converts had come. The insistence on having songs, dances, and a farce at the end of a serious play and the success of vaudeville and burlesque continued that old world tradition.⁴¹ The strong Mormon musical tradition was, in turn, highly compatible with Gilbert and Sullivan operas. *Pinafore* was an early favorite, and the newspapers tell us that rehearsals for *The Mikado* were going well and that the costumes had arrived from San Francisco, along with twenty-six pairs of Japanese shoes for the ladies, ranging in size from 1 to 10.⁴²

Where would the twentieth century story of theater in Utah lead? For this part of the narrative I am grateful to Harriet Arrington and to David G. Pace.⁴³ Pace has written a fascinating summary of the career of Maud May Babcock, the first woman to gain professional rank at the University of Utah, where she taught several thousand students oratory, speech, physical education, and acting for forty-six years.⁴⁴

In 1891 when Miss Babcock was teaching a physical culture class at the Harvard University Summer School, her class was attended by Susa Young Gates, Brigham Young's strong-minded suffragette daughter. Susa Young Gates was captivated by Babcock's teaching and helped persuade her to come to the University of Utah as an instructor of elocution. In the course of her long tenure there, Maud May, or "Miss B" as her students called her, produced and directed over three hundred stage productions and helped start a regional theater movement inspired by the Little Theater Movement, which had begun in Chicago and eventually swept the country. But always interested in physical culture and athletics,

41. Murray Biggs, Interview, November 5, 1998.

42. *Salt Lake Daily Tribune*, October 11, 1885,

43. Harriet Arrington, "Maud May Babcock," 2–14. David G. Pace, a former theater critic in Salt Lake City, now lives in New York where he and his wife, Cheryl, are co-editors of *Critic Quarterly*, a publication of the American Theater Critics Association.

44. David G. Pace, "Maud May Babcock (1867–1954): Speak Clearly and Carry A Big Umbrella," in Colleen Whitney, ed., *Worth Their Salt: Notable But Often Unnoted Women of Utah* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 148–58.



Maud May Babcock. Courtesy of Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah.

she also helped organize the first women's basketball games in Utah, where, as Harriet Arrington has noted, she introduced the innovative bloomersuit which disclosed the knee and ankle.⁴⁵

David Pace and virtually everyone she worked with declare that Maud May Babcock was one of the most vigorous, dynamic, free-ranging, articulate, and influential women teachers in America. Wanda Clayton Thomas, who was a professor in the Communications Department at the University of Utah, recalls that "this woman could frighten you to pieces; a woman of great dignity, [who] could also be the sweetest."⁴⁶

Born in New York State in 1867, Babcock graduated from the National School of Oratory in Philadelphia and from the Lyceum School of Acting in New York City. At the Lyceum her mentor was Alfred Ayres, a well-known Shakespearean scholar who told her that "If you can read Shakespeare properly you can read anything." Babcock also studied in London and Paris.

After coming to Utah she soon attracted hundreds of students to her class and in 1893 used the Salt Lake Theater for an exhibition of "fancy steps, attitudinizing muscular poses, drills, dances, Swedish movement, and Indian club and dumbbell performances." In 1895 one hundred of her female students performed what was to become the first play produced by a university in the United States. Called *Eleusinia*, it included "living statues of toga-ed figures in statuesque groups inspired by the Greek legends of Demeter and Persephone." The play, writes David Pace, was "a smashing success."⁴⁷

By 1897 Babcock had organized the University Dramatic Club, which performed an impressive array of major plays over the next few years, among them George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and Ibsen's *Pillars of Society*.

One of Babcock's students was Herbert Maw, future governor of Utah, whom she realized was terribly shy. Somehow she got him to play

45. Unless otherwise noted, the biographical information about Maud May Babcock is drawn from accounts by Arrington and Pace, cited above.

46. Interview with Wanda Clayton Thomas by Winnifred Margetts, March 6, 1985, for the Everett L. Cooley Oral History Project, nos. 255 and 256. Typescript in Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

47. Pace, "Babcock," 151-52.

Theseus the King in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, telling him to act and speak like one. As Maw, in a tribute to Babcock, recalled, "Thus followed six or eight weeks of torture" in which she taught him to "read and stress lines." "Make thoughts stand out," she told him. She also criticized his walking: "... she had to teach me to walk with dignity—the dignity of a king!" Maw recalled that "I learned to walk with self-control, and when I walked on the stage the opening night with my queen at my side, I was the king."⁴⁸ Maw must have been good because he later became an instructor in the University of Utah Speech and Theater Department, despite being a lawyer and having begun his political career. Faculty members who studied under Babcock feel that her insistence that you "become" the person you are portraying, anticipated or paralleled the famous Stanislavsky method of acting.⁴⁹

Over the next twenty years Babcock became head of the Department of Speech and helped found the College of Physical Education, which included instruction in dance. As noted above she was very much into the Little Theater Movement and conducted the first university little theater west of the Mississippi. In 1930 she got her own theater in Kingsbury Hall, in which she produced Maurice Maeterlink's *The Bluebird*. When she retired in 1938, the university named the student stage at Pioneer Memorial Theater for her.⁵⁰ "Miss B" trained not only four generations of college students in speech and drama but many others through her work as a devout Mormon in the LDS Mutual Improvement Association.

If I have demonstrated any theme this evening, it is that there has been a remarkable continuity and intimacy in the relation of Mormon culture and life to the theater. Beginning in Nauvoo when Joseph Smith built a "fun hall" and hired T. A. Lyne to produce plays, among

48. Maw reminiscences as cited in Arrington, "Babcock," 8–9.

49. Maw's role as teacher at the University of Utah is affectionately described in the Wanda Clayton Thomas interview. See pp. 30 and 56.

50. Pace, "Babcock," 157.

them Sheridan's *Pizzaro*, young Mormons such as Horace K. Whitney became enamored of the stage, as did the boy Hiram Clawson. Forty years later in Salt Lake City Horace Whitney had been in dozens of theatrical productions and his two sons, Horace G. and Orson F., were performers in a youth theatrical movement. In 1862 T. A. Lyne came to Salt Lake to direct and act in familiar plays in the Salt Lake Theater, now managed by John T. Caine and Hiram Clawson.

Perhaps the most impressive example of devoted continuity, however, is demonstrated by the Margetts family. Phillip Margetts, a pioneer blacksmith by trade, not only had helped found the first players groups but also had been Salt Lake's favorite comedian since the 1850s, just as Mrs. Clawson, a daughter of Brigham Young, had remained a favorite comedienne. But Phillip Margetts's son, Phillip Margetts, Jr., continued the family tradition as an actor, and one of his nephews, Ralph Margetts, became a professor of theater at the University of Utah in this century. To read Everett L. Cooley's 1883 interview with Ralph Margetts as part of the University of Utah's Oral History Project is to realize how central acting was to this family. As Ralph Margetts recalled to Cooley,

I believe I knew who Julia Dean Hayne [a visiting actress who captivated Salt Lake audiences] was before I knew who George Washington was. As a matter of fact, Julia Dean Hayne's photograph was hanging on our wall.⁵¹

Ralph Margetts worked at scores of jobs and served in World War II—wherever he was he joined an acting group, including the Pasadena Playhouse—before finally returning to Utah to take a master's and a Ph.D. His master's thesis, incidentally, was on his grandfather's theatrical life and his dissertation was on the career of Julia Dean Hayne.⁵²

This phenomenon calls for, I think, a profound reassessment of the nature of Mormon social life, at least in Salt Lake City in the nineteenth

51. Interview with Ralph E. Margetts by Everett L. Cooley, September 13, 1983, Everett L. Cooley Oral History Project, no. 20, typescript in Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 61.

52. *Ibid.*, 6–29, 50.

century. None of the plays performed involved hostility toward American political persecution, or a defense of polygamy or other church doctrines. Although each play, and rehearsals as well, began with a prayer, the plays themselves were not religious tracts. Nor did the plays echo frontier beliefs, although a play about Davy Crockett was very popular. As suggested earlier, the plays were often set in Europe.

All the actors were, of course, playing someone they were not. Was this an effort to escape the limitations of life in Utah, or romantic fantasy? Or an effort to seek release from what might seem a stern religion full of “thou shalt nots”? Or was it an effort to do the forbidden, or even to parody the everyday life of the Saints? All of these feelings were probably there in varying guises and degrees, but they were not the dominant ones. Rather most saw it as closely related to their Mormon lifestyle.

Although it is only conjecture, I think the joyous embrace of the theater stemmed from two factors: one is that theater is exotic. The theater is also life, but so was the Mormon experience. The greatest drama was the origins of the Latter-day Saints, a drama in which they were already involved and in which they had a role to play. The second was that the church itself had many religious rituals in which a single individual might assume many roles; a tradesman by profession might perform as a bishop as well as an official in temple ceremonies, all pointing toward a progression into other roles. Duties in their wards led both parents and youths to assume multiple roles as well.

How natural then to assume roles in an enjoyable dramatic production and how exciting, yet related, was the contrast to daily life. The theater was thus both a logical part of one’s existence and still another way of realizing one’s self. As Bulwer-Lytton put it, by realizing one’s potential one realized one’s identity.⁵³ Governor Maw’s moving from

53. Bulwer-Lytton used novels and plays, it is said, “to embody the leading features of a period, to show how a criminal can be reformed by the development of his character, and to explain the secrets of failure and success in life.” “Lytton” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. 14 (Chicago, 1958), 538–39. Similarly the Mormons also saw theater as a means toward realizing one’s potential and therefore one’s true identity. Certainly the careers of the four Mormon leaders whose careers prompted this study, John T. Caine, Hiram B. Clawson, Governors Heber M. Wells and Herbert Maw felt they had realized themselves through their careers in the theater.

shy student to Theseus the King is but one example. Heber M. Wells was not only an amateur leading man but a powerful speechmaker as the incoming governor of Utah in 1896.⁵⁴

Given the immediacy of the Salt Lake Theater and the need for female actors, most of whom were Mormon wives, it was inevitable that actresses would be viewed differently. Women on stage in the nineteenth century were generally viewed as loose, if not fallen, women. Not so in Utah. As veteran actor John Lindsay wrote in his memoirs, “Woman had long since demonstrated her equality with man in the arena of dramatic art.”⁵⁵ The respectful tributes to favorite actresses, whether local or imported, was striking. One of the most powerful performers visiting at the Salt Lake Theater was Julia Dean Hayne. She was the city’s heroine. Brigham Young actually fashioned a huge snow sleigh for outing parties and named it the Julia Dean. Mrs. Cyrus Wheelock’s performance in *The Lady of Lyons* was such that she was painted in the role by artist Solomon Nunes Carvalho, who was in Salt Lake City as a member of one of John C. Frémont’s independent expeditions.⁵⁶ The performances of Young’s own children, female and male, created an atmosphere of approbation unique to the theater.

All of this is epitomized in the accolades for Maude Adams, who, though born in Utah, which she always claimed as her true home, had her incredible success in New York as both actress—notably in Sir John Barrie’s *Peter Pan*—and manager of the Empire Theater in New York City for decades. Nevertheless she has become an icon of Utah’s theater buffs. The respect for Adams as woman and actress was fostered by favorable views of women on stage in Salt Lake City. Indeed her mother Asenath Anne Adams performed on the Utah stage before

54. Howard R. Lamar, “National Perceptions of Utah’s Statehood,” *Journal of Mormon History*, 23 (Spring 1997), 44, 53.

55. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre*, 177.

56. Bertram W. Korn, ed., Solomon N. Carvalho, *Incidents of Travel in the Far West* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1954), 223. I am grateful to Dr. Mary Lee Spence, University of Illinois, for calling my attention to Carvalho’s painting of Mrs. Cyrus Wheelock while in Salt Lake City.

moving to California.⁵⁷ Maud May Babcock, both dramatist and suffragette, as great as her accomplishments were, came into a remarkably friendly environment so far as theater and women in theater were concerned.

It is equally important to remember another continuity: the intricate relation of music, dance, and recitation to theater throughout, as well as the role of humor. Attendees at the Salt Lake Theater laughed and laughed at comedians, farces, minstrels, and story tellers. The grim outside image of Mormons as so intensively religious and polygamy obsessed that they could not allow for laughter and fun, must be corrected. The destruction of the Salt Lake Theater in 1928 to make way for a parking lot and commercial buildings was not a sign Utah was abandoning theater. Rather, it was a symbol that the old had made way for dozens of new theatrical enterprises in Utah.

I need not comment on theater in Utah today—it is more lively and flourishing than ever. In Logan alone you have a distinguished teacher, Floyd Morgan, and a theater is named after him. Ruth and Vasco Call's Children's Theater, known through the West, is outstanding. Theater studies at the University of Utah furnish an amazing number of youthful actors and dancers for the New York stage, and the Utah Summer Shakespeare Festival at Cedar City is one of the great theatrical events in the entire West. It is no accident that theater, dance, and music thrive on Utah campuses, for it is a long tradition that these arts are educational.

I end with a plea. I have just broached the subject of the role of the theater in Mormon culture and life, but I hope this will be an invitation for scholars and writers to see the Mormon past in a different light—to see happiness in the lives of a people in everyday life, to appreciate the English theatrical heritage as we have come to appreciate the Scandinavian rural and village heritage, and to investigate the remarkable rich and complex traditions of role playing in both the religious and secular life of this state, and not least, to explore the special status of women on the Utah stage.

57. Rachele Pace Castor, "Maude Adams (1872–1953): No Other Actress Can Take Her Place," in Whitney, *Worth Their Salt*, 189–202.

I would like to conclude with two quotations. The first comes from the last lines of Brigham Young's favorite Bulwer-Lytton play, *The Lady of Lyons*, in which the hero, Claude Melnotte, has won his wife, Pauline, by fraudulent claims as to who he is. He claimed to be a prince but was really a peasant. In disgrace, he goes off to war and comes home a hero and then discovers that despite his misleading her, she loves him dearly. They are reconciled and exclaim:

Ah! The same love that tempts us to sin if it be true love, works out its redemption. And he who seeks repentance for the Past, Should woo the Angel Virtue in the future.⁵⁸

It was a sentiment with which every Salt Lake theater-goer probably agreed.

The last quotation is from John S. Lindsay, a veteran of many acting groups in Salt Lake City, who declared that the early Social Hall theatrical group was a major event in the history of Utah. "It may be truly said that it marked an epoch in the development of civilization in the Rocky Mountain region."⁵⁹ I think I would agree.

58. *The Lady of Lyons*, (1851 edition), 72.

59. Lindsay, *The Mormons and the Theatre*, 11.