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# Ordinary Words: Towards a New Understanding of the 19th Century Mormon Male Diary

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Ordinary Words: Towards a New Understanding of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
Mormon Male Diary  
By Sara Jordan

“It is hard to believe that any group of comparable size, with the possible exception of the Puritans and the Quakers, has been as relentless as the Mormons in writing diaries and autobiographies.” So wrote Davis Bitton, in the Introduction of the 1977 publication *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies*, an index of nearly 3,000 published and unpublished works. Bitton, a close friend and colleague of Mormon History Scholar Leonard Arrington worked with Arrington for decades to create “a research program of [God’s] people’s history” (Arrington, 28). At the heart of that program was and continues to be the diary. Bitton and Arrington used diaries to build their compendious social and religious histories, to craft life histories of prominent and not-so-prominent Latter-day Saints, and to tell their own stories as Arrington noted in his autobiography, *Adventures of a Church Historian*, “The principal sources for this book are my diaries, letters, and other personal papers...” (239). And so it’s been for diarists and historians through time – creating, keeping, maintaining, preserving and using written records of their own lives and of their contemporaries and antecedents. In this paper, I will look at a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Mormon male diary as not only a source of information about a man and his era, but as a text which can reveal a specific kind of literary writing.

Several years ago, I received a transcribed version of the diary of my great-grandfather, Orson Gurney Smith. It came by way of my father’s cousin who discovered it in a box of family records when his mother died in 1994. Orson’s diary, which covers the period from 1875-1935, is now printed on 678 pages of acid-free paper and bound as one cohesive text although there

were several different original journals. Over the years, Orson was fairly consistent in his journal writing, but there are times when his record is sporadic and there are several significant chunks of time, for example Aug. 4, 1907 to Aug. 27, 1914, that are missing altogether. Family members believe that there is at least one other original journal that has not yet been located. Still, what we have is a new discovery that invites contemporary analysis and Orson's words offer an insight not only into the life of one man and his family, but also an era.

Orson was born on July 4, 1853 in Southwestern Iowa. His parents, Margaret Gurney Smith and Thomas X. Smith had joined the Mormons in Eaton Bray, England in 1849. Thomas, aged twenty, was baptized by a man named John Mead and was ordained a deacon by Benjamin Johnson, President of the nearby Edlesborough Branch. Johnson and his wife were the first converts in the area and described as "atypical" and with "unusually high" social status. Their enthusiasm for their new religion created a lot of excitement. One local convert wrote, "...Nothing else was talked about except this new doctrine and these men who are turning the world upside down." Edlesborough became the largest branch in nineteenth century Buckinghamshire (Bartholemew 111).

Within two years, Thomas was President of the Eaton Bray Branch. In 1851, he and Margaret were married in the Church of England. According to their marriage certificate, Margaret worked as a straw plaiter. Straw plaiting was a major cottage industry for women and girls in the area where there was a booming hat-making and bonnet industry. It was touted as a way out of poverty. By the time their first child, Lucy, was born in 1852, Thomas who had been listed as a laborer at the time of his marriage, had become a plait dealer.

In March 1853, the young family began their journey from Liverpool across the Atlantic on the *Falcon* with three hundred and twenty-four others, under the direction of Cornelius

Bagnall. Between 1851-1868, 47% of the Branch's membership (77 out of 163 Saints) emigrated to America. Many, like Margaret and Thomas, were able to do so through the support of the Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF), which provided material resources for Mormon immigrants.

They sailed from Liverpool to New Orleans on the *Falcon*. After more than two months at sea, they landed in New Orleans on May 18<sup>th</sup> and were there two days before sailing up the Mississippi River to St. Louis on the steamer *St. Nicholas*. They arrived in St. Louis on May 27<sup>th</sup> and immediately transferred their belongings to a smaller ship, the *Dee Vernon*, for the one day ride further north to Keokuk, Iowa.

For the next two weeks, Thomas and Margaret, now nine months pregnant, joined their fellow Saints in preparing the ox-carts and covered wagons that would carry them 1500 miles westward. The Smiths were part of the 22 wagon, 200 people Appleton M. Harmon Company of 1853. Harmon was the Company's Captain and James Jack was the designated scribe. In his *Journal of an Emigrating Company* Jack tells us that each family that was subsidized by the PEF received bacon, flour, sugar, a baking dish, kettle, for cooking, and soap, a bucket and washtub for cleaning. In addition, every two families shared a hatchet and a whip.

By 9:30 on the morning of June 15, the wagons were packed, the oxen were yoked and the Company headed out. For the next several weeks they traveled an average of 12-17 miles a day. They had been on the trail for nineteen days when, on July 4<sup>th</sup>, Margaret gave birth to Orson. James Jack wrote, "At 4 o'clock p.m. Sister Thomas Smith was delivered of a son under the care of Sister Robert Orr; wagon stopped 4 miles from camping ground." On July 14<sup>th</sup>, ten days after giving birth, the Company would cross the Missouri River. It would take the Smith

family another three months before arriving in the Salt Lake Valley on October 16, 1853 – after nearly seven months of travel from Eaton Bray to Zion.

Today, we can trace Margaret and Thomas’ journey not through their diaries – they didn’t leave any that we know of - but from other personal, church and civil records, which, for me, are invaluable. Since the 1500’s, record keeping had been a formal civic responsibility. Birth, christening, marriage and death certificates, as well as census data from the late 1700’s and early 1800’s reflects an institutionalization of British and American record keeping and the nascent rise of the bureaucracy.

Journals, like the one that James Jack kept were intended to contain an official record of the Mormon Saints trek west. His work, when combined with other scribes, reveals the history of a people during the time of migration and resettlement. Official record keeping has been a priority in the LDS community from its founding. Indeed, on the very day that the Church was organized (April 6, 1830) one of the first instructions that Joseph Smith received was that “there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). This was not a new idea in Christianity. The Bible is replete with scriptural references to records about grain, or sons or families. For Mormons, as many LDS leaders have pointed out through the years, the mandate to keep records is divine.

The nature of the Church as one that would be built on both “the word” a synonym for scripture, especially the Book of Mormon, and “words” like those that would be written in journals and diaries that would provide evidence of the Church’s spiritual and physical infrastructure, was revealed early on. To read words and to write them requires a level of literacy among its members.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, literacy rates were rising in America. Although formal educational opportunities were still limited in many areas, historians have reported that signatures were becoming more common on deeds and contracts than the simple X of an illiterate man or woman. A signature implied at least a cursory ability to read and/or write. Women's literacy in America was particularly important because the home and family was an important site of learning and teaching usually fell to the mother. Many women were self-taught as adults as more men worked away from the home and a public education infrastructure was not yet in place.

Joseph Smith was not formally educated, but he learned how to read, write and do basic math at home. Joseph's mother Lucy taught her children from the Bible. Lucy typified the post-Revolutionary War mother who took seriously her duty to instill moral, religious and civic values in her children who would be charged with nation-building. In this heady time of post-war liberty and independence, traditional religious practices were challenged by fresh ideas and structures.

In England, there was a similar upheaval as industrialization led to urbanization and denser population. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, literacy rates varied widely by geography and class. The middle class had access to formal schooling through private schools and tutors, but there were fewer opportunities for the semi-literate working classes, from which the majority of Mormon converts, including Thomas X. and Margaret, came. Cities in the north of England, particularly Manchester, were rich grounds for missionaries. Margaret and Thomas lived in the south in an area that was more rural and poor but attracted people from the same demographics in northern England and like Lucy and Joseph Smith in America – working class or poor, semi-literate and seeking a new spiritual home. Lucy and Joseph's story is documented in Lucy's

history of the family which was published in England in 1853, the year Orson was born. The keeping of family books was a common practice of the time in America and often the purview of women.

In the bookshops of Victorian England, the first commercially printed annual pocket diary was becoming available around mid-century. These hand-sized leather books, pre-cursors to modern-day planners, provided women and men a place to keep personal and social notes. In addition to calendars and account logs, the little diary had at least a few lines of blank space (Carter 251). As women and men adhered to the notion of separate spheres, with middle class women's lives privatized within the home, the diary became a repository for personal expression. Spatial limitations on the page required pithy inscriptions and became synonymous with women's restriction in the larger society.

There has been much emphasis in recent years on 19<sup>th</sup> century women's writing. We know that women's history was an interest of Leonard's. In 1955, early in his career, he published about the economic role of pioneer women. As I perused his files, I was impressed and moved by his commitment to tell Mormon women's stories. When I first received Orson's diary, I was actually most interested in reconstructing the lives of his three wives. But, early in my research for this project, I was introduced to a slim book called *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing* by USU Professor, Jennifer Sinor. Like me, she was given an ancestor's diary. This book articulates her journey to understand not just her great-great-great-great-great aunt, Annie Ray (who coincidentally started keeping her diary the same time Orson did) but also the writing itself.

The more I read Dr. Sinor's evolving ideas about 19<sup>th</sup> century women's diaries, the more I realized I had to study Orson's words, not just his stories. This turned out to be more

challenging than I thought it would be. While men's writing has been well documented for centuries, little attention has been paid to how it is situated in a gendered, literary social context. I found very little information that theorized the male diary as a text in its own right. I wanted to examine the role of the diary in recovering the lives, voices and positions of my ancestors.

In family lore, my father's grandfather, Orson Gurney Smith and great-grandfather, Thomas X. Smith, were important figures in the settling and building of Cache Valley. Since moving to Logan, I have looked for evidence of their efforts, but I have found little in the public narrative. Yes, there is a fairly large headstone on the Logan cemetery dedicated to Thomas X. who was involved in civic life and was the Bishop of the Logan 4<sup>th</sup> ward for forty years, but it is not nearly as elaborate as the markers of his contemporaries. The fact that it was erected by his faithful ward members to honor his service to them is nice, but why is his name rarely, if ever mentioned in the indexes of the biographies of the "great men" of the Church? Why does it matter?

A short answer to this question is that I feel he and Orson and the women in their lives should have a more accessible legacy. Perhaps that's why I was so excited to piece together their comings and goings from Orson's diary and from the diary of their friend Charles Ora Card. Card is credited for opening expanding the Mormon frontier into Canada, where he served as the first Mission President. When he was released from his position as President of the Logan Stake to go to Canada, he requested that Orson replace him. Orson served in that capacity for many years. He was also constantly engaged in finding ways to financially support his large family of three wives and twenty-seven children. The following excerpt from their journals documents a reunion of Orson, Thomas and Card Helena, Montana.

OGS Thursday March 2, 1887 - ...*I left my home and friends again. He took the train and arrived in Butte, Montana on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March where he was delayed...for three days owing to washouts on the R.R. After the road was over night. In the morning I took train for Helena.*

OGS On March 14, 1887 OGS arrived in Helena. He took rooms in the Brown Block. *I found that R.R. excitement ran high, and a great number of the men were in town bidding on the world of the M.C.R.R. This lasted until Monday 28<sup>th</sup>, when the bids were opened and the contract awarded...*

COC Saturday, March 26, 1887 - *This morning about 9 O'clock arrived in Silver Bow where I changed cars and landed in Helena Montana at 1 P.M. and was met by Prest Orson Smith who piloted me uptown and I procured a room in the Brown Bloch on North East corner in the third story. I felt grateful for my deliverance thus far.*

OGS Monday, March 28, 1887 - *We put in a bid in the name of Allen & Smith but failed in getting any work.*

COC Monday, March 28, 1887 - *I looked about town for a place to buy Plow, Harrow, etc. Wrote home in answer to a letter from Zina. Done some reading and walking about enjoying the fresh air that I have been deprived of so long.*

COC -Tuesday, March 29, 1887 - *To day dawns on me with renewed strength. Passed the time in walking and reading. About 2 P.M. Prest O. Smith escorted his father Bp T.X. Smith into my room which makes one more of our brethren delivered from oppression, at least temporarily. The Balance of the day was passed in conversing, writing and reading.*

OGS - Saturday, Apr. 2 1887 - *I have been buisy today purchasing some provisions and have paid out \$35.40 in cash. It is quiet cold today & is snowing a little. Father started north today. I bought him some blankets and fitted him out as best I could.*

COC Saturday, April 2, 1887 - *I passed the day here in procuring a fitout until 3 P.M. when I gave Orson Smith, S.F. Allen, and Andrew Anderson the parting hand & Bp. Thomas X. Smith started with Henry Morison [Morrison] as teamster. We drove 12 miles and camped for the night. Faced a cold wind & we also found it quite cool for our first night out so much so that ice froze in our tent about ¼ of an inch thick.*

This intertextual reading of Orson's and Thomas' diaries offers a glimpse into their many long absences away from home and their families in Cache Valley. Orson was in Helena to try to make some money on the rail roads; Thomas X. was there as a member of one of the first teams to go into Canada. As I compared Orson and Charles' writing, a rounded narrative emerged. I wondered what Arrington would do with them. Thomas X., like Edwin Woolley, a

longtime Bishop of the Thirteenth Ward in Salt Lake City, was what Arrington referred to as a “middle wagon Saint.” These were “not general authorities [but Saints who] illustrated Mormonism in action at the grass-roots and ‘second echelon’ level” (Adventures 134). Arrington spent a career amplifying such voices - men and women alike. But he didn’t do it alone. His archive is filled with articles and correspondence from people like Wallace Stegner who advised him on crafting biography.

Reading through Arrington’s records, I also found a number of articles on writing autobiography. As late as the 1970’s, in at least one article in Arrington’s file, there was still discussion about autobiography itself as genre without a home. There was not a single article, however, on the diary. I suspect this was due to the historical disregard of the diary as a literary text. In 1974, right at the time Arrington was reading about the crafting of biographies and autobiographies, Robert Fothergill published the first full-length study of the diary as a legitimate literary form. His work, entitled *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries*, categorizes the historical diary in four ways: journals of conscious which focused on spiritual experience and were kept most notably by the Quakers and Puritans; travel journals from the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries; public journals, which included logistical information on groups of people, like the one kept by Mormon scribes; and journals that kept “personal memoranda” – things like lists, logs and family records.

Fothergill suggests that these diaries were protodiary forms that preceded the personal diary we recognize today which was popularized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that I referred to earlier. The distinguishing characteristic of this diary is that it captures individual lived experience within a time-bounded diurnal structure. Historian Stuart Sherman theorizes that its roots can be traced back to the Netherlands in 1656 when Christiaan Huygens invented the pendulum clock.

For the first time, minutes and seconds as discrete units of time could be measured. Now spaces between the begin-end tick-tock of the pre-pendulum clock could be accounted for. The new metronomic rhythm of the tick-tick-tick articulated a middle – smaller units of time that were. The diary allowed recording of this time. The blank page could now capture what Jennifer Sinor calls, “time *in*”, or ordinary time, which she contrasts with “time *when*”, or occasioned time which invites reflection.

In 1974, the year Fothergill’s book was published, Charlotte Painter and Mary Jane Moffat published *Revelations: Diaries of Women*. His was the first full-length study of the diary as a legitimate literary form; theirs the first on women diarists. Over time, as scholars recovered more writing by women, interest grew in the scientific study of the diary as a gendered text. Diary scholarship grew out of several academic theories. Literary theory considers definitions and analysis of text; cultural theory is attuned to the everyday, and feminist theory, particularly historiography, is concerned with voice – especially the female voice.

Diary scholarship became conflated with gender as feminists associated the diurnal structure of the diary, or it’s “dailiness” characteristic, with patterns and cycles in women’s lives. Jennifer Sinor explains, “Dailiness means that the diary does not cohere around an organizing event or principle but rather, by documenting the everyday, makes the measured (and typically unmarked) moments available for the diarist’s use. Dailiness will not allow some events to be privileged over others – but always rests in the middle. Writing in the days refuses occasion, climax, and closure” (Sinor, pg. 56). The structure of space and time on the diary page invites specificity of activity and discourages reflection.

But reflective is exactly what LDS leaders encourage. “Your private journal should record the way you face up to challenges that beset you...your journal, like most others, will tell

of problems as old as the world and how you dealt with them” (Kimball 26). And this is the way Mormon personal writing is typically done. But perhaps there are other ways that a recorded account of a person’s life can be considered, like through the lens of ordinary writing, which Sinor defines as “the kind of writing that comes from the unmarked moments of every day” (196). Moments like eating, paying bills and chatting with one’s neighbor. It’s this aspect of dailiness that can be contained so effectively in a diary.

Arrington lecturer and Pulitzer prize winner Laurel Thatcher Ulrich recognized this in the her work on Martha Ballard. “It is in the very dailiness, the exhaustive, repitious dailiness, that the real power of Martha Ballard’s book lies” (9). So too, did Donna Toland Smart who edited Patty Bartlett Sessions diaries.

*Patty, as time passed by, as she became deaf, as the population grew and her faculties diminished, withdrew more and more into the boson of family and very close associates. She still wanted to maintain the work ethic accumulated over decades, but her faculties began to fail, which diminished the accomplishments that she had recounted in all those earlier diaries. Her writing eventually slows to a plod, gives little information, and even seems boring in its habitual repetitions.*

*But such a statement reflects a shortsighted value judgment. To be obsessed with deciphering all the intricacies of her diaries; to witness the gradual aging and decline of a great pioneer woman; to see her entries fade into words such as ‘the same’ and later a mere recital of dates; to read ‘it is now Friday the 4<sup>th</sup>’ and then find the rest of the page – and all other pages – blank is to feel a sense of profound loss, but also to understand a fraction more about the fleeting nature of human experience and to develop respect for the enduring value of personal records (29).*

Personal records that are kept in the tick, tick, tick of the here and now. Neal Lambert, whose article on Mormon autobiographies I found in Arrington’s folder, posits that this focus on the here and now is characteristic of early Mormon writing and distinguishes it from other religious writing of the time. In general, he says, the diaries of 19<sup>th</sup> century Mormons are not very other-worldly. Saints like Patty Bartlett Sessions, and Thomas and Orson Smith were “buisy” trying to build a Kingdom of God, and that took blood, sweat and tears. “...In locating

their ultimate concerns in the immediate world of common man, nineteenth century Mormons were essentially secular...even their theology was reduced to a set of intellectual constructs derived from everyday experience” (70). Orson’s diary certainly illustrates this. Take for example these entries:

Monday Feb. 26, 1883 ...*I went to the Bps Court to hear the complaint of a Sister against her husband. She desired a divorce. In the afternoon I had an interesting talk with Bro. Ira Allen. Friday, I hauled two loads of sand from Hyrum.*

Wednesday November 9, 1932 *A landslide for Democrats. 19 million for F.D. Roosevelt, 13 m(illion) for Hoover. Now for a new deal all around. I was at temple all day. Logan Stake Day and night.*

This practice of making events equal is one characteristic of ordinary writing. There are others that feminists assert are drawn from the daily gendered acts of living. Orson’s diary and those of his contemporaries reveal many traits that have been ascribed to 19<sup>th</sup> century women’s writing and particularly the diary. If, as poet Adrienne Rich argues, the diary is a “profoundly female and feminist genre” where does that leave writing like Orson’s? I believe the answer lies in further exploration of Sinor’s notion of ordinary writing in relation to Mormon male diurnal texts. Ordinary writing has its own rhetoric that I don’t believe has been applied to such work.

In the chart below, I have juxtaposed some binary characteristics of diary writing as defined by Dr. Sinor. The list on the left has been gendered as male – the master narrative of the literary; the list on the right as female – the deviation from the master narrative and correlated with Sinor’s concept of ordinary writing.

Coherent	Fragmented
Storied/narrated/time <i>when</i>	Non storied/unnarrated/time <i>in</i>
Whole – Beginning, Middle, End	Interrupted
Public	Private/domestic
Published	Unpublished
Created	Consumed
Saved	Discarded
Occasional	Measured

Marked	Unmarked
Answers literary questions	Cannot answer literary questions
What the writer does	What the writing does
Privileged	Unprivileged

When I examined Orson’s diary, I found plenty of evidence of ordinary writing and the four qualities that Sinor suggests flow from the diurnal nature of the diary as a text: measuredness, middleness, openness, usefulness.

On the first page of his diary Orson wrote, “The Design of the writer is to record the more important events as they transpire each day from the above mentioned date, as they occur in his life or as far as this book will contain them.” Evaluating his words using the qualities above, they reflect measuredness, middleness and openness but Orson complicates his position as an ordinary writer by stating his intention to mark “important” events. “The Design of the writer is to record the more important events (occasioned) as they transpire each day (measured) from the above mentioned date (middle), as they occur in his life (open) or as far as this book will contain them”(3). There is a definite pattern of ordinariness, with occasional deviation, throughout his writing.

1. Measuredness – This is the quality that Sinor describes as time *in* rather than time *when*. It’s the tick, tick, tick of the clock. It’s the parts of the sum that is a whole life, the nondescript daily activity. Here’s what measuredness looks like in Orson’s diary in 1882 (35):

Jan. 2, (Tuesday): *I commenced settling tithing today and was kept very buisy all day. Attended the Y.M.M.I.A in the evening.*

Jan. 3, Wednesday: *I have not been so buisy today. Will not get enough as I expected to this week.*

Jan. 4, Thursday: *Today is fast day. I went to meeting and we had a good time in speaking of the goodness of God to us. I was buisy all the rest of the day with tithing maters (matters).*

Jan. 5, (Friday): *Today I have not done very much.*

Jan. 6, (Saturday): *Went to Logan after some goods for the store and to take some tithing. Learned that the smallpox had broke out in the Fourth Ward.*

Contrast the measuredness of the above entries with the occasioned writing below. In this passage (69), Orson reflects on the events of a few days earlier and he uses complete sentences.

On May 20, 1884 (Tuesday): *On the 16<sup>th</sup> I went to Logan to attend the conference. Most all of the presidency and Twelve were there, and in the afternoon the authorities of the Stake were presented and I was put in as second councilor to the President C(harles) O. Card. This was a sudden blow to me, as I had had no intimation of it before. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the Temple was dedicated, I having been set apart the night before. Took my place with the presidency of the Stake in the east stand. We had a most splendid time all through the conference. The people were permitted to go all through the Temple and all caused to rejoice. I attended the Y.M.M.I.A. in the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> and Seventy's Meeting on the eve of the 19<sup>th</sup>, and I have just got home today. All well at home.*

Through his syntax he is marking his days and drawing attention to something extraordinary that has happened.

2. Middleness – This is the quality of being in the middle of successive action. There is no critical distance or space for longitudinal reflection. Orson writes that his diary begins on

Jan. 3, 1882. His entry for that day, which is located on page seven, reads:

*Commenced making this journal and have resolved to try to keep it up as near as possible and record the more important events of my life. Also commenced settling tithing for the year ending Dec. 31, 1881.*

While he may have put pen to paper on that date, the entries are not arranged in chronological order. Jan. 3 follows Jan. 2 and 1, for which there are also entries. Prior to

that, there are several single blocked pages with content. The real first page of transcribed diary that I have looks like this:

ORSON SMITH JOURNAL  
OCT. 4, 1875 – AUG. 5, 1935  
Paradise, Jan. 3, 1882

The design of the writer is to record the more important events as they transpire each day from the above mentioned date, as they occur in his life or as far as this book will contain them.

Orson Smith

A short narration of incidents since 1875.

In the first line he writes:

Oct. 4, 1875. Thursday. *Passed through the house of the Lord and was sealed to Caroline M(ariah) Carpenter.*

Caroline was Orson's first wife and his marriage seems like a good place to start. He was twenty-two and had his adult life ahead of him. He then recounts how within a few months, he was called to be the Bishop of the Paradise ward.

*"This was a blow to my prospects, for I had long wished to become educated, and I thought I was just getting in good shape to do so. But I felt my duty to the Gospel and Church of which I claimed (claimed) to be a member, was more to me than anything else. With this feeling, I made a determination to go and do the best I could" (3).*

As he did above when recording retrospectively, he writes in narrative form and stays in this style until Jan. 2., the day before he "commenced making [his] journal." He notes this himself in his "narration of incidents". For the next sixty years, Orson will write consistently. When he misses a day, he will try to fill in the blank. The result is a successive accounting of time broken up into years, months, day, hours and minutes. At any point in the journal, the reader is in the middle of his flow of time, his flow of words.

3. Openness – Openness is concomitant with the quality of middleness. As a result of being in the middle of words and life, neither the reader nor the writer knows when it will end

and in some ways it doesn't – at least not until death. Openness forces the immediacy of measuredness because it is impossible to prepare for what might come next. Sinor correlates this with a literary climax. "Climax requires the simultaneous privileging of certain events and deprivileging of others in order to propel the action forward. It requires that the writer modulate how events unfurl" (163). This is impossible in ordinary writing.

Jan. 12, Thursday: *This morning I labored around home until noon when I went up town & while talking to Bp. B.M. Lewis & J.G. Kimball, I got word that my wife Carrie was sick. I hastened home & at about 9 p.m. a son was born to her Gaylen). All went well during the process of delivery.*

Jul. 13, Friday: *All doing nicely. My wife felt so well today that she said if I had to go off she should feel perfectly satisfied to let me go.*

Jul. 14, Saturday: *Took great pleasure in talking with my wife today while she lay in bed & to see her happiness gave me great joy.*

Jul. 16, Monday: *All doing well this morning until 11 a.m. when my wife complained of a pain in her right side near the hip. This increased until 11 p.m. in the evening when I went for Dr. Parkinson. Upon his arrival she was suffering so intensely that he injected into her hip some morphine. This eased her so she rested a little during the remainder of the night.*

And it continues this way until July 21, Saturday: *I tried to sleep but it was but little as I arose & went to the door of her room. I felt the child of death...*

Carrie died that day – sepsis from childbirth. As Orson's daily entries continue though, the cadence and rhythm of his writing remains intact. Like many diarists, he employs the rhetorical skill of parataxis. His sentences are short, simple and open. He cannot stop the tick-tick-tick of mortality and he writes that onto the page. On July 23, only eleven days since the birth of his son and two days since the death of his wife he writes:

*This day takes from my house the body of my devoted wife & out of respect for her a numerous hose of friends followed her remains. Consoling remarks were made in the Tabernacle by Apostle Mosses Thatcher & M.W. Merrill, Bp. W.B. Preston. At the grave Bro. Isaac Smith offered the dedicatory prayer and L.R. Martineau*

*dismissed. I had a brick vault build to receive the coffin & it looked quite comfortable. Many of my sisters were at the house on our return & two of them will remain over night. And so the last sad rites have been performed & now we try to reconcile our feelings & take up the work where she left it off, & carry in on to an ultimate completion, & may God grant that we shall have strength to do it as creditably as she did hers. We now have a tie beyond the tomb to which we are bound by the strongest of ties, & I hope she will be permitted to hover near us & make impressive our mission. My sisters came in & talked to me & the girls & have shown great sympathy for us, as also hundreds of our friends.*

4. Usefulness - In making the rhetorical choices he does, Orson demonstrates his awareness of the diary conventions of the day. In most of his entries, for example, he records the weather. This would be of concern to him as was constantly out-of-doors, enroute to a Church, family or community activity, but it was also a standard diary notation. He uses his diary in other ways as well:

- \*Business – to record his goals, financial dealings, accountings and failures
- \*Church – to note responsibilities and offer an periodic expressions of “testimony”
- \*Social - to comment on community events and to track changes in the lives of friends, associates and those in his charge
- \*Family and domestic life – to track livestock, farming ventures and the bounties of the gardening; to track the activities of his family and maybe even family members themselves – he had three wives and twenty-seven children
- \*Personal struggles – to relieve his loneliness when he is away from his family or to write out his grief at the loss of people he loves

While Orson’s diary does reveal his personal history and by extension, bit and pieces of the lives of those around him, it reveals far more about contemporary writing conventions, social and religious practices of record keeping, and the values of his 19<sup>th</sup> century faith. He leaves evidence of a time and place not just in his stories, but also in his word patterns. His writing tells us that he too, like Annie Ray, was a man constrained by expectation and opportunity.

Every year, diaries are discovered in attics and basements – old voices to be recovered, untold stories waiting not be narrated necessarily, but brought to life through the lens of ordinary

writing. I think Arrington, both as an historian and as a diarist, would support such a project.

Here's why:

1. Arrington was committed to applying academic scholarship to his study of Mormon history.
2. Revisiting 19<sup>th</sup> century diaries as legitimate historical and literary texts offers a new way to approach that “middle way between naturalism and faith that might allow the secularist and the believer to find common ground”.
3. Arrington's own files attest to his desire to understand a multi-vocal Mormon culture.
4. He was continuously evolving his own knowledge and skills to help him accomplish his mission.
5. He was not afraid to explore notions of gender as it was socially constructed in his day.
6. He was interested in cross-genre research as evidenced by his combining economics and history.

In a speech Arrington gave at Brigham Young University in 1981, he complained that “Histories of families, guilds, towns and nations gave emphasis to the political and economic realities of life but did so with little analysis. Indeed, history was more a branch of literature than of science” (Arrington 119). Arrington spent a lifetime learning how to analyze Mormon history and realized early on that “We are inclined toward a male interpretation of Mormon history” (61). I would love to talk with him about Jennifer Sinor's work and see how he would use it. I find that in her theory of ordinary writing, 19<sup>th</sup> century text meets 21st century scholarship. It is a tool with which gender, hierarchy and privilege can be examined. I believe that Arrington would encourage that. And, I think that he would understand her assertion that

“We can never actually tell another’s story, but we can fail to move beyond story and into that which does not seem to matter yet is the majority of our lives” (Sinor 207).

In the lecture that bears his name, Arrington’s children told the audience that on the last day of his life, February 13, 1999, their father walked to the door, and opened it to the cold air so that he could pick up his newspaper.

On August 5, 1935, Orson *Watered [his] lawn and got vegetables for the day. Felt dizzy & must have fainted as I found myself on the porch flooring. Got up and brought the mail in.* Orson died that night.

Around and between the many moments of extraordinary greatness these men experienced in their long lives, there was the ordinary. Perhaps an analysis of these words will inspire personal writers and scholars alike to reassess how we value and interpret history.

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2010 Leonard J. Arrington Lecture & Archives Foundation  
2010 Writing Awards

Synopsis of Lecture  
By Sara Jordan

The title for the lecture was *A Paper Mountain: The Extraordinary Diary of Leonard James Arrington*. After a welcome and mention of past presenters, this year's presenters, Susan Arrington Madsen and Carl Arrington, reviewed their father's life as a spoken biography punctuated by their reminiscences and quotes from his journal.

Leonard Arrington came from humble beginnings in Idaho. He experienced multiple health issues as a child, but made excellent grades in school, worked on his family farm, and fell in love with family and personal history. In college he combined his passions and intellect on a course of study that he remained committed to throughout his career. He also became more attuned to diversity in the world and he developed a foundational belief that, "There is good and bad in every religion."

He later spent three years in the military, then married Grace Fort who beautified women's hair and the Arrington home. They (mostly she) raised three children in an active, intellectually stimulating environment. Arrington used words and communication to make and keep connections with people. For his own family, he produced a weekly family letter for 27 years and wrote numerous books and articles and conducted many oral histories. He practiced his belief that "an historian commits his life to writing the history of people and events that he is passionate about."

Arrington's career took him around the world, but his heart remained in the Intermountain West and he never lost focus of the Mormon history that he so loved. He taught at several universities, was the LDS Church Historian from 1972-1982 and founded a number of journals and organizations. His life was instilled with a conviction that "God expected me to carry out research of his people's history."

The evening ended with a reminder that "we should all continue to write" and an announcement about next year's presentation on the connection between 19<sup>th</sup> century Mormonism and Islam.