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# Journal of Mormon History

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# JOURNAL OF MORMON HISTORY

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*Front Cover:* Top panel: The mission office at Viale Mazzini 35 in Florence. Photo courtesy of Noel Zaugg. *Back cover:* A weekly magazine in Milan featured missionaries in their signature white shirts on its cover shortly after a second mission was created in July 1971. Photo courtesy of James Toronto. Top right panel: Emanuele Giannini, right, with an unidentified missionary. He was baptized on June 26, 1965, the only member in his home village of Varese Ligure. Photo courtesy of the LDS Church History Library. Lower panel: Missionaries in Rome, opened for missionary work in January 1967, used street boards to attract passersby. Photo courtesy of Noel Zaugg. See James A. Toronto, “The ‘Wild West’ of Missionary Work: Reopening the Italian Mission, 1965–71,” this issue.

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*Map of Italy, showing some major centers of LDS missionary activity 1965–71. Courtesy of BYU Studies.*

# THE “WILD WEST” OF MISSIONARY WORK: REOPENING THE ITALIAN MISSION, 1965–71

*James A. Toronto*

FOLLOWING THE CLOSURE of the first mission in Italy in 1867, Mormon evangelization of Italy resumed after a century’s hiatus against a backdrop of social change and political unrest that would both propel and hinder Church growth. The first missionaries returning to Italy were initially ill prepared but earnest in their efforts to attract converts, employing a variety of innovative strategies to introduce their message and dispel widespread stereotypes about Mormonism among the Italian public. Mission leaders sought ways to provide adequate training for young missionaries living in isolated conditions and struggling to adapt to the rigors of missionary life in an alien culture. At the same time, new converts required sup-

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*The first group of twenty-two missionaries gather in Lugano, Switzerland, preparing to enter Italy in February 1965 and begin proselytizing. President John Russon is kneeling on the bottom row, far left. A mission mini-van is in the background. Photo courtesy of the LDS Church History Library.*

port as they faced daunting challenges of their own: the social cost of being among a small minority of Italians to embrace a “foreign” faith and the difficulties inherent in adjusting to their new religious identity and community.

#### **THE RETURN TO ITALY**

In the winter cold of Saturday morning, February 27, 1965, twenty-two missionaries gathered at the LDS chapel in Lugano, Switzerland, in the southern canton of Ticino.<sup>1</sup> They had traveled there from three different European missions—the South German, Bavar-

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<sup>1</sup>Documentary sources and interviews contain conflicting information about the number of missionaries involved in opening the new mission. Some put the number at 23, but the photo clearly shows only 22 plus President Russon. Also, there is disagreement about the number of missionaries who went into Italy: several say that only 20 transferred to Italy

ian, and Swiss—and had been instructed to fast and pray in preparation for this important meeting. Most of these elders had previously proselytized in Italian-speaking zones in Germany and Switzerland and now, because of their first-hand experience with Italian language and culture, had been reassigned to form the vanguard for a momentous undertaking: the reopening of formal missionary work in Italy. After the missionaries shared testimonies and feelings about their new assignment, John M. Russon, who had been called as the president of the Swiss Mission in 1962, gave the group final instructions. Then they split up and headed south toward Italy, some taking the train and others squeezing into the mission's two Volkswagen minibuses, with Russon riding in one.

After arriving at the rendezvous point, the Stazione Centrale in Milan, the missionaries traveling by bus received a sobering introduction to their new field of labor when “the suitcases of about three of the elders were stolen right out of the mission bus, right in front of the train station.” The office staff back in the mission home in Zurich found some humor in the inauspicious incident, opining in the mission newsletter that “apparently the devil is determined that these [missionaries] shall proceed without purse or scrip.”<sup>2</sup>

This theft did little to dampen the elders' enthusiasm. Most had been preparing for and anticipating this noteworthy event for months. The missionaries dispersed to seven cities—Pordenone, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, Milan, Turin, and Como-Varese—which Russon had divided into the Milan, Turin, and Vicenza districts of the Swiss mission's new Italian Zone (headquartered in Milan). These cities had been chosen in part because a few Italian or American Mormons were already living there who could help the missionaries. After

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with two of the 22 staying in Lugano.

<sup>2</sup>“Italy Invaded,” *Reaper* (newsletter of the Swiss Mission) 3, no. 21 (February 27, 1965): 1; typescript copy in my possession. For additional information on the reopening of the Italian Mission, see “Missionary Work Resumed in Italy after Lapse of Century,” *Church News*, March 20, 1965, 12; John Marshall Russon (1911–2000), Oral History #588, 1975, 16–23, 43–38, LDS Church History Library; Italian District, Swiss Mission, 1963–66, Quarterly Historical Report, March 31, 1965, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, LDS Church History Library, LR 4139 (hereafter cited as Italian District Manuscript History); and Gilbert W. Scharffs, *Mormonism in Germany* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 186–96.

registering at the local police station (*questura*) and locating a place to live, the missionaries began the challenging task of introducing a new faith in Italy's religious landscape.

The "spot tracting" carried out by President Russon and two elders on an earlier trip to Italy suggested that the Italians would be receptive to the missionaries' message; and from the first day of proselytizing, this proved to be the case. With very limited knowledge of their new field of labor and few resources or networks to rely on, the missionaries resorted mostly to tracting—knocking on doors in residential areas—as their main method of contacting. It became customary for missionaries to keep a card file or written log of names contacted while tracting so that missionaries who worked in the same area later could refer to the previous notes and have some idea of which buildings and doors they might revisit. Despite the long hours and physical demands of going door-to-door, the elders generally reported a sense of exhilaration at finding so many people who were willing to listen, treat them with kindness, share their meals, and engage in religious discussion.

Besides noting the curiosity and hospitality of the Italians, the missionaries often commented on the contrasts in living conditions that they encountered while tracting through a cross-section of Italian society of the mid-sixties. There were private villas of wealthy elites; apartment buildings guarded by *portieri* ("door men") of the growing upper and middle classes; government housing projects; and sprawling urban slums of those who had recently migrated from the economically depressed regions of southern Italy to the industrial and commercial centers in the north where job opportunities were more plentiful. The missionaries had arrived at a time of rapid transformation in Italian society, as mass migrations from south to north brought about isolation, dislocation, dissolution of kinship ties, loss of status and identity, and a search for meaning and belonging in life. It was a time of social tensions and political ferment, with Italians struggling to cope with the changes that were reshaping the structure and assumptions of traditional Italian life.

Studies of this era document the "dramatic" cultural, psychological, and social impact of these changes as Italy experienced both the benefits of the post-war "economic miracle" but also unrest and alienation stemming from mass movement of populations, appalling living conditions, and discrimination against immigrants in northern

cities.<sup>3</sup> Paul Ginsborg asserted that this period of inter-regional migration was “unparalleled” in Italy’s history. From 1955 to 1971, more than nine million Italians “left their places of birth, left their villages where their families had lived for generations, left the unchanging world of rural Italy, and began new lives in the booming cities and towns of the industrial nation.” The southern regions of Puglia, Sicily, and Campania “suffered the greatest haemorrhages of population,” and the major industrial centers of central and northern Italy “were transformed by this sudden influx.”<sup>4</sup> Guido Crainz described these changes as an “essential aspect” of the times that “radically shaped the ways of living and working, of producing and consuming, of thinking and dreaming of the Italians.”<sup>5</sup> In sum, these turbulent circumstances and the ecumenical reforms implemented by Vatican II helped create the relatively open, receptive religious climate that the missionaries enjoyed during their first months in Italy.<sup>6</sup>

The experience of Elder Bruno Vassel, who with his companion opened proselytizing in Verona in February 1965, was typical of those early halcyon days. Vassel began his missionary service in the Bavarian Mission in August 1963 and labored for several months in Nuremberg as part of the Italian-speaking zone before his transfer to Italy. Accustomed to dealing with constant rejection in his previous work in Germany, he found his new assignment a refreshing change: “Italy was just heaven—it was the celestial kingdom. We talked with 50 people and made 15 appointments for teaching in one day. And day after

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<sup>3</sup>Percy Allum, “Italian Society Transformed,” in Patrick McCarthy, ed., *The Short Oxford History of Italy: Italy Since 1945* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14–15; Jonathan Dunnage, *Twentieth Century Italy: A Social History* (London: Pearson Education, 2002), 158–60.

<sup>4</sup>Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943–1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 218–20.

<sup>5</sup>Guido Crainz, *L’Italia Repubblicana* (Firenze: Giunti, 2000), 38.

<sup>6</sup>Other excellent sources on this transformative period in modern Italian history include Silvio Lanaro, *Storia dell’Italia Repubblicana: L’Economia, La Politica, La Cultura, La Società del Dopoguerra agli Anni ‘90* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992); Guido Crainz, *Il Paese Mancato: Dal Miracolo Economico agli Anni Ottanta* (Roma: Donzelli, 2003, 2005), chaps. 6–10; Simona Colarizi, *Storia del Novecento Italiano* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2000), chap. 8, “La Grande Trasformazione (1953–1968)”; Giuseppe Mammarella, *L’Italia Contemporanea, 1943–1998* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2000).



day, city after city, we filled our appointment books by tracting.” He also gradually realized that there were linguistic and cultural nuances that would require some adjustments in their approach to proselytism. It soon became clear that the Italian language he had absorbed while proselytizing in Germany among Italian *gastarbeiter* (“guest workers,” allowed in Germany on limited visas only to supplement the labor force) was more of a dialect, a fact that introduced him to north-south differences, one of the underlying tensions in Italian society. While he and his companion were tracting one day, a woman listened to them for a few minutes and then responded indignantly: “Why are you speaking like Sicilians? Don’t you know that Italy ends in Rome?”<sup>7</sup>

Lloyd Baird, who had started his missionary service in the Swiss Mission in April 1965 but transferred to Verona, Italy, just three months later, had similar encouraging experiences: “My mission in Italy was a wonderful time. . . . We were a bunch of kids having fun. Switzerland was a bear—we would do two months of tracting without getting in a door, whereas in Italy, everyone was willing to talk and their love of life made the experience interesting. It was easy to fall in love with the people and the culture.”<sup>8</sup> Jim Jacobs, assigned to Italy in summer 1965 after working with Italians in the North German Mission, recalled that he was “happy to have an Italian behind every door—they were curious, open, engaging. . . . I adored the Italians. Many were poor but invited us in, fed us, and listened to us.”<sup>9</sup>

Although the missionaries spent the bulk of their time doing door-to-door tracting, they also tried to be innovative in finding ways to contact people and to raise awareness of their presence. They used the “street board” (*mostra stradale*) consisting usually of plywood panels on which scriptural quotations and illustrations were mounted. Setting them up in busy commercial districts, parks, and piazzas, the missionaries would use them to attract attention and initiate conversations. Often, after checking in at the *questura* of

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<sup>7</sup>Bruno Vassel, Talk at the All-Italy Mission Reunion, March 31, 2006, Salt Lake City, notes in my possession; and Bruno Vassel, interviewed by James Toronto, July 27, 2006, Salt Lake City notes in my possession.

<sup>8</sup>Lloyd Baird, interviewed by James Toronto, August 23, 2005, Provo, Utah; notes in my possession.

<sup>9</sup>James Jacobs, interviewed by James Toronto, July 17, 2006; notes in my possession.



*Missionaries in Rome, opened for missionary work in January 1967, set up a mostra stradale (street board) in Piazza Cavour to attract passersby into conversation. Photo courtesy of Noel Zaugg.*

a new city, the elders would visit the offices of the major newspaper to speak with editors and reporters, encouraging them to publish a story about the arrival of the Mormons in Italy. Occasionally the newspapers responded; and in time, a number of stories—most of which were unsolicited by the missionaries—began to appear in Italian print and electronic media.

Another activity that became common was the participation of musical and athletic groups from the Church-owned Brigham Young University in free concerts and in local competitions. In July 1965, for example, the BYU track and field team, as part of a European tour, came to Milan to compete in a track meet against universities from both Milan and Turin.<sup>10</sup> Events like this were always a welcome diversion for missionaries who lived near enough to attend. While such events offered a break from tracting, they also drew throngs of spectators, including the press, and the missionaries seized the occasion to

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<sup>10</sup>Leavitt Christensen (1915–2001), Letter to family, July 25, 1965, Leavitt Christensen Papers, 1960–89, MS 13473, LDS Church History Library. All Christensen letters are from this collection.

pass out literature and initiate religious discussions.<sup>11</sup> Another proselytizing method employed by some missionaries involved looking up names of Italian members converted in Germany and Switzerland and now back in Italy, then contacting them to invite them to come to church and to ask if they had family and friends who might listen to their message.<sup>12</sup>

Cities were opened, closed, and occasionally reopened to proselytism as the missionaries “tested the waters” to determine an area’s productivity. One common approach for selecting a city for missionary work was for a pair of elders to stop in a neighborhood, do some spot tracting to get a feel for the receptiveness of the people, and then after prayer and consultation with mission leaders decide whether to continue laboring there. A city might be closed down and missionaries withdrawn because of tepid response, overt opposition, or, as in the case of Milan, effective vigilance on the part of *portieri* guarding apartment buildings.<sup>13</sup>

Once the decision was made to open a city to missionary work, the elders adopted a strategy of meeting local power brokers to facilitate entry into the community’s social and religious space. Missionaries sought to meet the mayor, the local Catholic priest, and (in northern Italy) Communist leaders. Sometimes these efforts led to unexpected encounters. In one southern city, upon inquiring who could help find an apartment, the missionaries were told to go to the piazza to meet “the employment counselor.” There they found a man “like someone out of the Godfather movie sitting in the park, drinking wine, people consulting him. We explained our religion.

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<sup>11</sup>The Italian Mission, “Progress Report, January-June 1968,” July 15, 1968, copy in my possession, courtesy of Rodney Boynton; “Italian Basketball,” *Improvement Era* 71, no. 1 (January 1968): 72.

<sup>12</sup>Leavitt Christensen (1915–2001), “History of the LDS Church in Italy, Swiss Mission, for the years 1962, 63, 64, 65 and 66, 1992,” section entitled “Italian District President under the Swiss Mission,” MS 13412, LDS Church History Library (hereafter cited as “History of the LDS Church in Italy, Swiss Mission”); “Solingen: Italians Hear Gospel Plan,” *Church News*, August 21, 1965, 4.

<sup>13</sup>Vassel, Interview. Vassel was the zone leader for the Italian Zone with headquarters in Milan and, as was the case for some missionaries in Italy during this period, he proselytized and traveled at times without a companion.

He listened for a while, then he said, 'OK—you'll be all right.'" A short time later someone appeared and informed them that "we knew you were coming and Giuseppe said we should help out." The missionaries discovered later that their benefactor was one of the Mafia chieftains in town.<sup>14</sup>

#### OPPOSITION TO MORMON PROSELYTISM

As long as the presence and activities of the missionaries went relatively unnoticed, they encountered little resistance to their efforts to find and convert religious seekers. But as more missionaries arrived in the following months and the number of Italians attracted to their message increased, the opposition to proselytizing stiffened. The opposition originated primarily from two sources: local police and parish priests. Although the Italian constitution of 1948 guaranteed the right of all religious groups to propagate their faith publicly, traditional attitudes and loyalties in post-war Italy were still deep seated. The transition from religious monopoly to religious pluralism was slow, although legal structures and societal perspectives would evolve in the direction of religious diversity over the rest of the twentieth century. It was not surprising that implementation of laws and citizens' actual behavior in streets, workplaces, and schools lagged behind.

Officials at the local level, responding to complaints from citizens offended or threatened by the proselytizing of new religious groups, frequently took steps to discourage missionary activities. It was rare for Mormon missionaries to be arrested; and if so, they were quickly released because their activities were legally protected. For their part, the missionaries, ever-ready to find an audience for their message, viewed these encounters with local police officials as an opportunity to make contacts by means other than tracting. In May 1966, for example, police in Padua brought two missionaries into the station in response to complaints about their work. While they were questioned, the elders established a friendship with one of the officers who later joined the Church.<sup>15</sup>

Leavitt Christensen, a native of Kanosh, Utah, was working as a civilian personnel officer at the Camp Darby military base near Pisa

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<sup>14</sup>Baird, Interview.

<sup>15</sup>Italian Mission, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, LR 4140-2, LDS Church History Library (hereafter cited as Italian Mission

when he was appointed president of the Italian District of the Swiss Mission in 1964. He reported an incident illustrating the dichotomy that surfaced at times between national law and local practice where religious freedom was concerned:

The police [in Varese Ligure] came and told the Elders that they could not hold meetings without special permission from the government and that if they met together, more than two of them, it was a meeting and that they would be arrested if they did so. . . . The missionaries were having meetings in the back room of a tavern. The police told them that it being a public place that such meetings were prohibited. They were also prohibited from holding meetings outside as it was against the law. Any tracts they distributed required payment of 20 lire tax per copy. That is a little over 3 cents per copy.

Christensen commented that similar problems existed throughout Italy but was well aware of the distinction between the stance of the federal government and behavior at the local level: "The local officials are the problems; they don't follow the party line from Rome which is to tolerate other faiths."<sup>16</sup> Both early converts and missionaries also emphasized that opposition stemmed from deeply rooted religious attitudes at the local and personal level, not from government policies in Rome or directives from the Vatican.

Typically, during the first few weeks after their arrival in a new city, the missionaries had little difficulty finding people to teach. But as local priests began to hear reports from parishioners that Mormon missionaries were circulating in the area, trying to win converts, openness to their message and teaching opportunities began to wane. Missionaries reported that, in some instances, their tracting in a neighborhood prompted local religious leaders to visit their parishioners and dissuade them from responding to the Mormons' recruitment efforts.<sup>17</sup>

"It was interesting and predictable, when those weekly reports

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Manuscript History); and Historians (unnamed), "The History of the Italian Mission," August 28, 1966, 9, typescript, copy in my possession; Christensen, Letter to family, October 8, 1966; Noel Zaugg, email to Toronto, April 30, 2014.

<sup>16</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, July 25, 1965.

<sup>17</sup>John Duns Jr., Oral History #500, interviewed by Richard L. Jensen, 1975, 16, typescript, James H. Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Church

would come in,” Russon observed in his oral history. “We would read the same glowing reports the first week, and then the second week a little bit of fallout would show up. And then over a period of six or eight weeks we would detect some discouragement on the part of the missionaries as they would find these pressures building up and the people finding too much pressure to withstand in some cases.” He noted that, while a few investigators requested baptism—“the cream would always rise to the top”—proselytizing became increasingly difficult for the missionaries after the early euphoria wore off. “Those first initial weeks were beautiful. [The missionaries] thought they were in a paradise, because they’d come from Germany and Switzerland where the going had been hard, and here were all these doors opening for them. It was a bonanza for a while. But then the realism began to settle in as the pressures would build up as described.”<sup>18</sup> Because of the hostile reaction that conversion often evoked from family, friends, and neighbors, early converts in some cases had to pull their children out of school and move away because other students and their parents made life so miserable for them. A young attorney who converted to Mormonism in Verona lost three jobs in a short time and eventually moved to another city.<sup>19</sup>

Opposition also came from evangelical Protestant groups who were trying to make headway in Italy and viewed the arrival of the Mormons with alarm. Well-founded rumors of LDS plans to begin missionary work in Italy had begun to circulate before February 1965, and one Italian Protestant group held a conference near Rome to receive instruction from an American member of their church on how to counteract the Mormons. Four LDS Church members who attended the Protestant meeting reported that the Protestant missionary propagated false and outrageous allegations (e.g., that Mormons hold sexual orgies in their temples), role-played Mormon proselytizing tactics, and gave suggestions on how to thwart them.<sup>20</sup>

Both John Russon and Leavitt Christensen viewed Catholic and Protestant opposition as temporary obstacles that would diminish over time. Russon reported that an attorney in Modena wrote to him

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History Library.

<sup>18</sup>Russon, Oral History, 46.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>20</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, February 1965.

requesting that missionaries be sent to that area. The two men met and had a long conversation while traveling together to Lake Garda near Verona. Based on their candid exchange of views, Russon concluded that the attorney “manifest the spirit of reform that was going on in the minds of the people” and that many Italians were “anxious” to see “what [the LDS Church] and perhaps other religions could do to help break this hold of the Catholic Church, because it dominates virtually every aspect of their lives, just as we let the [LDS] Church be so much a part of our lives. It governs them financially . . . politically for the most part, and religiously. And so if they go counter to the church, they can really feel the pressures the church brings to bear.”<sup>21</sup>

Russon’s astute observation about the parallel influences exerted by the Catholic and LDS churches respectively in their areas of dominance had its ironies, but it also gave him confidence that religious diversity would develop for a variety of reasons. Investigators were not just changing one religion for another. Similarly, Christensen described how some Catholic priests exerted social and economic influence to protect their interests but likewise predicted that, in time, less defensiveness would develop. In some areas, “the local priests give some sort of absolution to the employers if they will hire only those who are recommended by the priest, therefore no one gets work unless the priest says so. If the employer doesn’t cooperate then he doesn’t get the blessings of the Church and he suffers. They are good enough business men to see that that doesn’t happen. It is going to be hard going until enough people are converted to establish a precedent and break this strangle hold on the economy.”<sup>22</sup>

The story of Pietro Emanuele Giannini, one of the first Italians baptized after the arrival of the missionaries, illustrates the challenges and isolation that Italian converts often faced during this period as they turned away from their traditional religion toward a new religious identity and way of life. In late 1964, Leavitt Christensen received a letter from Giovanni Ottoboni, a Church member of Italian origin living in Argentina, who said that he wanted to teach and baptize his mother, two sisters, and an uncle who were still living in Italy. President Russon agreed to send two of the first missionaries in Italy to Varese Ligure, a small village sixty kilometers north of La Spezia, to help teach Ottoboni’s relatives. Some of them expressed a desire to be

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<sup>21</sup>Russon, Oral History, 45.

<sup>22</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, July 25, 1965.



*Emanuele Giannini, right, with an unidentified missionary. He was baptized on June 26, 1965, the only member in his home village of Varese Ligure. Photo courtesy of the LDS Church History Library.*



baptized, and on June 26, 1965, Christensen and his wife, Rula, together with the two missionaries, drove to the village to conduct the baptismal interviews:

When we got there we found that the local priests had scared most of the family off. They had told them that anyone who joined the new sect would be denied burial in the town and would be [cut off] from all social activity. The aged mother and daughters then refused baptism but the old uncle was not intimidated and decided to go through with it. In doing so he put his little business and his only means of living in great jeopardy. His name was Pietro Emanuele Giannini. He was found to be worthy of baptism. Brother Ottoboni [who was visiting from Argentina] had prepared a pool in the thick foliage at the outskirts of the town. So all members went there for the baptism. The event had not gone unnoticed in the town. As we looked about us we could see several townspeople peering through the foliage. They showed both curiosity and consternation. We invited them to come closer to watch but they would not. Instead they jeered and flung ugly names at Brother Giannini. They reminded him of the fate that would befall him. He was not moved by any of it. Amid this the baptism was held.<sup>23</sup>

To avoid further disruptions, the group walked a mile uphill to a secluded spot to confirm Giannini a member of the Church. News of the baptism spread quickly through the isolated village, and within thirty minutes spurious rumors were circulating that the Mormons had baptized Giannini naked. Then local religious leaders took action, presumably as a lesson to those who might consider conversion in the future: "Now the priests have apparently forbidden people to come to the old man's tavern and he is about to close it due to lack of customers. . . . The old man says he doesn't care anyway because what he was selling is against the word of wisdom and he shouldn't be in that business."<sup>24</sup>

Six months later on January 2, 1967, Christensen and Daniel Walsh, president of the LDS American servicemen's group in Livorno, traveled to Varese Ligure to visit the new Italian convert:

On the way we worried lest Brother Giannini might have drifted back into his old ways due to his dependence on the little business and

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<sup>23</sup>Christensen, "History of the LDS Church in Italy, Swiss Mission."

<sup>24</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, July 25, 1965; Christensen, "History of the LDS Church in Italy, Swiss Mission."

also due to loneliness. As we walked into the establishment no one was there except Brother Giannini who sat alone in a far corner. When we approached he looked up and then sprang to his feet and embracing each, planted the usual hello kiss on each cheek of each of us. When we looked at the table we found that he had been reading the Book of Mormon. Brother Walsh asked him if he had read it all the way through. He replied that he had read it many times. Brother Walsh's question was unnecessary because a quick look at the book showed that all the pages were dog-eared and dirty from handling. Brother Giannini stated that the Book of Mormon was his best and only real friend in town. We returned home happy in the knowledge that he had so much courage, but sad that he had to endure so much in the little village.<sup>25</sup>

Giannini's baptism illustrates a pattern of conversion that was fairly typical of these early days: An individual living in an area of Italy distant from any of the organized branches in urban areas requests contact with the Church, is taught and baptized by missionaries who travel great distances to do so, and then struggles in isolation and ostracism to maintain her or his new faith but who constitutes a tenuous presence for the new church. Two other conversion stories illustrate this pattern of spiritual conversion and the individual courage and commitment that made it possible for the LDS Church to gain a toe-hold in difficult religious terrain.

In November 1965 Rendell N. Mabey, an attorney from Bountiful, Utah, who served as president of the Swiss Mission (1965–68), traveled from Naples to Palermo in Sicily to conduct some business for the Church.<sup>26</sup> While there he arranged to meet Antonino Giurintano whose sister, Giuseppina Oliva, had joined the Church in Argentina and then returned to Palermo. Antonino had written several let-

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<sup>25</sup>Christensen, "History of the LDS Church in Italy, Swiss Mission."

<sup>26</sup>Rendell Noel Mabey (1908–2000), Oral History, Interviewed by John W. Mayfield, Bountiful, Utah, 1980–81, MS 2735–418, LDS Church History Library; Rendell Mabey, "A Sicilian Baptism," *Reaper*, 4, no. 7 (December 4, 1965): 1–2. Among many interesting aspects of his life, Mabey had been a big game hunter in Africa a decade earlier in 1955. A decade after completing his Swiss mission, he and his wife, Rachel, became one of the first two American LDS couple-missionaries to serve in West Africa after the 1978 revelation. See Russell W. Stevenson, "Sonia's Awakening: White Mormon Expatriates in Africa and the Dismantling of Mormonism's Racial Consensus, 1852–1978," in this issue.

ters to Church offices in Buenos Aires asking for missionaries to come to Sicily and teach him, and his petitions had been forwarded to the Swiss Mission office in Zurich. Mabey recounted the beginnings of LDS presence in Palermo:

I had brought with me a letter from a Mr. Antonino [Giurintano], to whom I had some six weeks earlier mailed a Book of Mormon. I told Brother Di Francesca<sup>27</sup> that I felt we should visit that man that very night. When we finally located the good man and his family, he was overwhelmed with joy. He handed me a letter which he had just written in which he requested that I come to Palermo at once and baptize him. He was just about to go out the door to mail the letter to me as we arrived. After some three hours of inquiry and discussion, it was concluded that this man was ready for baptism.

He agreed to close down his little factory for the baptism. We met the next morning and, with his wife, son, and his sister who is a member, proceeded to the market place to purchase white clothing suitable for baptism. . . . The six of us adults then climbed into a little cab with the driver and proceeded to the sea just outside the harbor area. Sicily is not unlike a big rock pile, and the sea coast is very unfriendly as far as beaches are concerned. We finally selected a fairly secluded piece of coast [a beach area known as Vergine Maria]. It was cold and the waves were substantial. We changed our clothes among the large rocks, held a prayer circle, and then I held Brother Antonino by the hand and together we entered the water. Brother Di Francesca sat on a rock above us and served as witness.

It was very difficult to stand because of the sharp rocks, high waves and an undertow. Suddenly it was not so cold and the waves subsided enough for me to baptize him. As he arose from the water a big wave hit us and pulled us into deep water. We were just about to undertake to swim when another wave pushed us back towards shore. We were then

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<sup>27</sup>Vincenzo di Francesca, from the mountain village of Gratteri near Palermo, had become acquainted with Mormonism by reading the Book of Mormon. He joined the Church in 1951. His conversion story is well known among LDS Church members as it was published in various Church media. See Vincenzo di Francesca, "I Will Not Burn the Book," *Ensign*, January 1988, 18–21; Don Vincent di Francesca, "Burn the Book," *Improvement Era* 71 (May 1968): 4–7; *How Rare a Possession: The Book of Mormon*, film, directed by Russell Holt (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), VHS in my possession; "Pres. Bringhurst Baptizes First Convert in Sicily," *Deseret News*, "Church Section," February 28, 1951, 12–13; Swiss-Austrian Mission, Manuscript history and historical reports, Vol. 12, April 28, 1956–May 2, 1956, LDS Church History Library, LR 8884–2.

able to touch bottom and reach shore. There Brother Antonino sat on a rock and was confirmed a member of the church by Brother Di Francesca.<sup>28</sup>

President Mabey made the long journey back to Palermo the following May (1966) to baptize Giurintano's colleague, Salvatore Ferrante, who worked in the same factory. At first Ferrante's father opposed his son's baptism; but befriended by Mabey, he consented to the baptism and even helped with the translation of the ceremonies from German (spoken by both Mabey and the father who had been a guest worker in Germany) to Italian for the few members in attendance. Mabey then organized the Palermo Branch with Antonino as president and Salvatore, Giuseppina, and Vincenzo rounding out the branch membership.<sup>29</sup> The following week the branch held its first sacrament meeting in the home of Sister Oliva on the first floor of Via Crociferi, 24, and thereafter the branch grew rapidly (*a macchia d'olio*) as the small group of Palermitan converts proselytized mostly through family networks.<sup>30</sup> Mabey continued to correspond with the branch members concerning personal and family problems, and he sent missionaries from Naples once each month to assist them.<sup>31</sup>

Almerina Michelini, her husband, Leone (an orchestra conductor), and their two children had converted to Mormonism in September 1964 in Munich, Germany. Her experience (along with that of Giuseppina Oliva and Giovanni Ottoboni) illustrates the crucial role that Italians converted abroad played in helping establish the first small groups and the obstacles they often faced during this early period in finding space and opportunity to meet with fellow believers.

In October 1964 we returned to Turin and were the only church

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<sup>28</sup>Rendell Mabey, "A Sicilian Baptism," *Reaper*, 4, no. 7 (December 4, 1965): 1-2. See also Antonino Giurintano and Elisabetta Simoncini, interviewed by James Toronto, May 23-24, 2001, Palermo, notes in my possession; and Luca Simoncini, "La Storia dei Primi Pionieri del Ramo di Palermo," (n.d.), copy of typescript in my possession.

<sup>29</sup>Italian District Manuscript History, June 30, 1966 report; Christensen, Letter to family, May 22, 1966.

<sup>30</sup>Luca Simoncini, "La Storia dei Primi Pionieri del Ramo di Palermo," (n.d.), copy of typescript in my possession.

<sup>31</sup>Rendell N. Mabey, Letter to Giuseppa Oliva, June 16, 1966; photocopy in my possession.

members there. The missionaries came from Switzerland to visit us once each month. On February 27, 1965, the first missionaries arrived in Italy to work full-time, and eight were assigned to Turin. The first LDS community was established in my house, on the second floor of Via Tunisi, 10. Every Sunday I cleared out the kitchen and borrowed extra chairs from my neighbor [to hold sacrament meeting]. That happened for three months, and the first conference of all the missionaries in Italy with President Russon was also held in our home in April 1965. . . . Later, when my family had to leave Turin, another meeting house was located at Corso Re Umberto, 45. The landlord of the apartment agreed to rent the apartment to the missionaries only if I took responsibility and only with the guarantee that I personally would assume liability for any eventual damages.

A few months later, Almerina moved with her children to their family home in Polesine because her husband could not leave his job in Germany. They spent the next two years without contact with Church members except for occasional visits from the missionaries until an LDS branch was opened in Padua, sixty-three kilometers away. Despite the distance, the Michelinis' perseverance helped open the way to the first tenuous growth in that area: "Getting to Padua for Sunday meetings meant waking up at 4:00 A.M. due to scarcity of good connections on the secondary bus and train lines, and then arriving in Padua at 9 A.M. We didn't get home until 1 A.M. that night. For this reason we decided to move to Padua, and in 1968, in my house at Vicolo Cigolo 51B were performed the first eight baptisms."<sup>32</sup>

#### **ESTABLISHING A TOE-HOLD IN ITALIAN TERRAIN**

Gradually, with a baptism here and there, and with Italian converts returning home from Germany and Switzerland, the seeds of Mormonism took tenuous root in Italian soil. Missionaries continued to be reassigned from the Italian zones of German-speaking missions; and by the time of Russon's release as president in July 1965, the number of missionaries serving in Italy stood at forty-four, all of them assigned to northern Italy.

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<sup>32</sup>Almerina Michelini, "I Primi Anni della Chiesa a Torino," [www.bellasion.org](http://www.bellasion.org) (accessed July 15, 2012); Shaun D. Stahle, "Members Celebrate 30 Years of Gospel in Torino, Italy," *Church News*, November 2, 1996, 7; Zaugg, email to Toronto.

President Mabey took an active role in promoting missionary work in Italy, despite being stretched impossibly in his geographically vast mission. Upon receiving his call as president, he had thought he would be able to sleep at home most nights because Switzerland is a small country. But then he learned the true dimensions of his mission field: the German- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, North Africa, the Middle East, and all the Iron Curtain countries except East Germany—twenty-one countries in all by the time the Mabeys finished their mission.<sup>33</sup> An important milestone was reached in March 1966 with the organization of the Brescia Branch, consisting entirely of Italian members (five in all), with Leopoldo Larcher as president.<sup>34</sup> A second milestone occurred in the spring of 1966 when Naples was opened to missionary work, marking the first movement of Mormon missionaries south of Florence to central and southern Italy.<sup>35</sup>

Elders generally provided branch leadership because only a handful of Italian men had joined the Church in each area, and most, at this early stage, lacked the necessary understanding of Church administration. Church meetings on Sunday were often held in the living room of the missionary apartment or a member's home until there was a nucleus of members large enough to warrant renting a separate apartment or building as the Church's meeting place in a city.

The missionaries who served during this groundbreaking period in Italy were given a great deal of autonomy and flexibility in their proselytizing methods. Other than sending in a written report, they had only sporadic contact with the mission president—usually at zone conferences a few times each year. This meant that the elders and sisters had minimal oversight from the central office in Zurich to determine proselytizing methods, allocation of time and money, living arrangements, and how to solve problems.

Because of the geographical expanse of his mission field and his own leadership style, Mabey encouraged the missionaries' autonomy.

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<sup>33</sup>Mabey, Oral History, 147, 171.

<sup>34</sup>Italian District Manuscript History, March 31, 1966, report; Christensen, "History of the LDS Church in Italy, Swiss Mission," journal entry, April 11, 1966; Christensen, Letter to family, April 11, 1966.

<sup>35</sup>Italian District Manuscript History, June 30, 1966 report.

“I used to tell the missionaries that this was their mission just as much as it was mine and that the Lord would bless them just as much as He would bless me, and He trusted them just as much as He trusted me, and I trusted them too.” During zone conferences Mabey would interview all the missionaries, sometimes during mammoth sessions that lasted six or eight hours at a time. Often he huddled in his overcoat, since the old buildings or schoolhouses often had inadequate heating or none, despite the bitter cold. Despite this strenuous schedule, Mabey also made a point of visiting the missionary apartments, or “pads,” to check on their living and work conditions.<sup>36</sup>

During this era, the mission organization was fairly spontaneous and a spirit of making do and figuring things out independently was encouraged. It was, according to one elder, the “Wild West” of missionary work: “I didn’t see a mission president for nine months for district and zone conference and interviews. We only had to write a letter to the mission president once/month, but other than that there was very little accountability. . . . We were a bunch of gunslingers out there doing what we thought we needed to do.”<sup>37</sup> For instance, in Switzerland and Germany, with a colder climate and more formal culture, the missionaries normally wore suits. But in Italy, where life was more relaxed and the climate hotter—at least for certain times of the year—the elders dressed less formally in white shirts, ties, and slacks. Badges bearing the missionary’s and the Church’s names had not yet become a part of standard missionary attire.

The majority of missionaries appreciated the reduced structure and greater degree of trust. For the most part, they engaged in proselytizing with single-minded dedication. However, Mabey estimated that perhaps 3-5 percent did not rise to the occasion. They saw the lack of close supervision and less stringent standards as an opportunity to avoid the rigors of missionary life. They sometimes ignored or relaxed dress and grooming standards, engaged in unapproved activities such as football and basketball tournaments as diversions, and traveled outside of their assigned areas.<sup>38</sup> A whole genre of mission folklore developed around the topic of illicit mis-

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<sup>36</sup>Mabey, Oral History, 147, 153–54, 158.

<sup>37</sup>Baird, Interview.

<sup>38</sup>Mabey, Oral History, 150, 157.

sionary trips, referred to as *austflugs*.<sup>39</sup>

### IDENTIFYING PSEUDO-MORMONS

A fascinating development during this incipient stage—one that has been documented in other contexts as well—is the appearance of pseudo-Mormon groups or individuals who adopted the name and selected teachings of the LDS Church without authorization.<sup>40</sup> According to the account of Leavitt Christensen (president of the Italian District), in April 1965 he accompanied President Russon and Paul Kelly (a U.S. Air Force officer stationed at Aviano airbase near Pordenone and serving as a counselor in the Italian District presidency) to meet with a “professor” who was making unauthorized use of the LDS Church’s name. They traveled by car to Grisolia (near Cosenza), a remote hilltop village at the end of a long drive in the dark along winding mountain roads. The three Church leaders found a doorway with the name of the Church inscribed in large, bold, red lettering. A man came to the door and invited the guests into his small apartment.

For the next ninety minutes, President Russon conducted a de-

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<sup>39</sup>*Austflug* (German) means “excursion” or “trip.” Stories abound of elders who took boat, train, or motor bike trips to France, Yugoslavia, Austria, Germany, Greece, or North Africa. A popular account tells of a companionship who took the boat to Libya, covering their absence by completing and dating several weekly reports in advance and instructing their landlady to send in one each week. They returned to discover that she had sent them in the wrong order. Variations of this story are common in missionary folklore. William A. Wilson, “On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries,” *Sunstone* 7, no. 1 (January-February 1982): 34–35; and Wilson, “The Paradox of Mormon Folklore,” in Thomas G. Alexander, ed., *Essays on the American West, 1974–1975* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1976).

<sup>40</sup>A similar phenomenon occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, although with more positive results. See, for example, Emmanuel Abu Kissi, *Walking in the Sand: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Ghana* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2004), 33–36; Rendell N. Mabey, *An African Legacy* (Salt Lake City: Rendell N. Mabey, 1998), 50–51; E. Dale LeBaron, “African Converts without Baptism: A Unique and Inspiring Chapter in Church History,” *Brigham Young University 1998–99 Speeches* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1999): 57–66; and LeBaron, “The Church in Africa,” in [unnamed editors] *Out of Obscurity: The LDS Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 177–89.



tailed interview about the group's origins and activities. The "professor" had heard about the Church from an uncle in Boston and had received letters, pamphlets, manuals, pictures of Church presidents, teaching aids, and roll books from Church headquarters in Salt Lake City. Though unbaptized himself, he had baptized 300 "converts" to Mormonism in a nearby river and counted several thousand other followers in surrounding towns. The professor, it appeared, was collecting tithing from the group to support himself and a clandestine political agenda. He expressed interest in having the Mormon missionaries come teach his congregation; but when Russon explained that membership would involve giving up wine, coffee, tobacco, and tea, he retorted: "I don't think the members would go for that. These things are needed in Italy." The visitors then noticed a picture of Adolph Hitler on the wall and asked the professor about it. He arose and tore the picture down, stating that he had no affiliation with the Nazis.

At that point, Russon ended the interview and the visitors bade their host goodnight. Russon and his two companions recommended in their report that the LDS Church should exercise more caution when receiving such requests and investigate "similar movements prior to furnishing lesson materials and supplies and prior to giving evidence of support in the form of official letters. It is believed such letters if confiscated by the authorities in Rome might prove embarrassing and possibly detrimental to the Church in its efforts to gain official status in Italy."<sup>41</sup> It is not clear what became of this group, as mission records contain no further references to its activities.

#### **"LONG LIVE ITALY!" THE ITALIAN MISSION REOPENS**

June 1966 marked sixteen months of Italian missionary work under the auspices of the Swiss Mission. President Russon reported in 1965 that the Italian missionary zone had been baptizing at four times the rate of the rest of the mission.<sup>42</sup> By August 1966 the number of converts stood at forty-two. The missionary force had grown to forty-seven elders and two sisters working in almost twenty cities, with two Italian-member branches operating in Brescia and

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<sup>41</sup>Leavitt Christensen, Item #4: "A Report of a Professor Who Organized a Religion Using the Name of the Church, 1965," Christensen Papers.

<sup>42</sup>"Italians Hear Gospel," *Church News*, October 9, 1965, 6.



*The mission office at Viale Mazzini 35 in Florence which by summer 1967 had replaced the original headquarters at Via degli Artisti 8. Photo courtesy of Noel Zaugg.*

Palermo.<sup>43</sup> These positive results tipped the balance in favor of creating a new mission in Italy.

In July 1966 the president of the new mission, John Duns Jr., and his wife, Wanda, stood on Ponte Vecchio in Florence watching Rendell and Rachel Mabey disappear into the summer crowds. Florence had been chosen as mission headquarters because of its cultural importance, historical openness to non-Catholic religions, and its geographical location between northern and southern Italy.<sup>44</sup> President and Sister Mabey had traveled with them in northern Italy for several days, meeting members and missionaries, getting acquainted with Florence, and overseeing renovations in the

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<sup>43</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, September 30, 1966; Henry A. Smith, "From the Church Editor's Desk: Laying the Ground Work," *Church News*, August 13, 1966, 6.

<sup>44</sup>Russon, Oral History, 22; Christensen to family, May 22, 1966, Christensen Papers. Mabey reported that part of the reasoning was related

mission home. The Mabeys bade them farewell, saying: "All right, President, it's your mission now. We're going to go back home [to Zurich]." <sup>45</sup> President and Sister Duns felt the full weight of their new challenges and responsibilities begin to sink in. At that moment, Duns later observed, he and his wife "felt we were the loneliest two people in the whole world." <sup>46</sup> Few programs and materials were available. The mission had no headquarters, and the Duns family had no place to live for the time being except a small *pensione*.

Duns, from Palmdale, California, was a pragmatic man with a reputation for getting things done. For three and a half years in the early 1960s, he had lived with his family in Italy, working as an engineer for Lockheed Aircraft and Fiat Corporation and serving as the LDS servicemen's coordinator. After assessing the situation as the new mission president, he decided to start with the most pressing matters and to work in familiar territory. To begin developing the Italian church, he relied on contacts in business and government that he had established during his first sojourn in Italy.

With the help of former colleagues at Fiat, he negotiated reduced prices for the purchase of mission vehicles. <sup>47</sup> Fiat colleagues helped him collaborate with Pirelli and Michelin companies to design and produce a new, portable baptismal font: a breakthrough in the proselytizing campaign in Italy, according to Duns. After deciding to install one in each meeting place, "that's when the baptisms started," because it solved the problem of finding suitable places to perform

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to concerns that the higher rate of poverty and unemployment in the south might attract converts for the wrong motives. He quoted an unspecified source as saying, "Don't go south of Florence because if you get down in the south end of Italy, the poor will join the church only for the Welfare Program." Mabey, Oral History, 146.

<sup>45</sup>John Duns Jr., Oral History #500, interviewed by Richard L. Jensen, 1975, 9, typescript, James Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>47</sup>"Ci Manca Un Nome" (mission newsletter), August 24, 1966, Italy Rome Mission, Publications, LR 4142-20, LDS Church History Library. At this early stage, the mission newsletter was rudimentary and lacked a name; subsequently, the office staff launched a mission-wide contest to find one.



*In August 1966, Apostle Ezra Taft Benson organized the Italian Mission from the Italian District of the Swiss Mission. Left: Flora Benson, Ezra Taft Benson, John Duns, Jr., the new mission president, and Wanda Duns. Photo courtesy of LDS Church History Library.*

baptisms by immersion during cold winter months.<sup>48</sup> His circle of professional contacts proved beneficial in cultivating positive rela-

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<sup>48</sup>Duns, Oral History, 9–10, 19; Christensen, Letter to family, Easter 1967. Duns noted that he got the idea of using portable fonts from the France mission.



*Missionaries and a few Church members attend the historic organization of the Italian Mission in Florence in August 1966. Photo courtesy of LDS Church History Library.*

tions with government officials: “Through my work I was able to take President Benson right in to the ministers in Rome. The doors just opened to us.” He also tapped into the existing strength and structure of the American servicemen’s branches: “That’s where we tried to start our missionary programs. . . . That’s where we tried to assign missionaries to work, using servicemen and their families in the program which the Church wanted—to help people they knew. We tried to get them in local areas to find places to meet, places to live, and to start [teaching] the gospel.”<sup>49</sup>

A few days after his arrival, Duns issued an appeal to all the missionaries to renew their commitment to work hard in establishing the Church in Italy:

After a week in this wonderful country of Italy, I can truly tell you that I’m grateful for my calling to preside over the new Italian Mission along with my wife and daughter. It’s going to require a tremendous amount of work to accomplish our goal: to teach, baptize, and then fellowship these lovable Italian people. The eyes of the whole church are upon us—particularly because of the location of our new mission. I ask and request the full devotion of you all—not just a superficial devotion which works when there is nothing “better” to do, but a deep-rooted devotion which is willing to sacrifice to reach our ultimate goal: baptize

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<sup>49</sup>Duns, Oral History, 9.

and build up the church in Italy.<sup>50</sup>

He selected several elders to serve as his office staff and, assisted by Ferrin Sager, a full-time Church employee from the regional office in Frankfurt, rented and began furnishing a space at Via Degli Artisti 8 in the city center to serve as the mission office. An apartment located at Via Lorenzo Il Magnifico 26 became the Duns's residence, and the living room was mission headquarters until the mission offices were ready. For a time, they had no office machines and no stationery. Elder Jim Jacobs, one of Duns' assistants, recalls sitting at the coffee table in the Duns living room and typing out transfers on his Olympia typewriter that he had brought with him from Germany.<sup>51</sup>

On August 2, two weeks after Duns's arrival in Italy, Ezra Taft Benson convened an all-mission conference in Florence. The purpose was to reestablish a formal mission of the Church in Italy. Plans for reopening the mission were kept relatively quiet to avoid attracting negative attention from other religious groups.<sup>52</sup> During the five-hour meeting held in the new mission office, with forty-seven missionaries present, the Italian Mission was officially organized with Duns as mission president, Leavitt Christensen as first counselor, and Leopoldo Larcher as second counselor.<sup>53</sup> To mark the transition, one enthusiastic missionary wrote: "The Swiss Mission is dead. Long live Italy!"<sup>54</sup>

### TRAINING, SUPERVISING, AND MOTIVATING MISSIONARIES

With the mission formally established, the flow of missionaries into Italy increased sharply and the need for more effective training, supervision, and organization became more urgent. The first new elder,

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<sup>50</sup>Transfer sheet, July 29, 1966, Christensen Papers.

<sup>51</sup>James Jacobs, Interviewed by James Toronto, July 17, 2006, notes in my possession. Also, James Jacobs, Email to James Toronto, October 31, 2006, copy in my possession.

<sup>52</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, May 22, 1966.

<sup>53</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, September 30, 1966; Historians (unnamed) of the Italian Mission, "Italian Mission History"; Christensen, "History of the LDS Church in Italy"; "The Church Is on the Map," *Church News*, August 27, 1966, 6.

<sup>54</sup>Cited by Ralph Mabey, All-Italy Reunion, March 31, 2006, Salt Lake City; notes in my possession.

Yves Jean, arrived from France the day after the conference. Groups of missionaries from the United States arrived in August and were assigned to work in southern Italy and Sicily. By September, missionaries numbered sixty, and the force had swelled by October to ninety-five. The mission was organized into one zone consisting of twelve districts, and many cities were opened to missionary work including Bari, Brindisi, Foggia, Avellino, Messina, Palermo, Agrigento, Catania, Cosenza, and Reggio di Calabria. By December, the number of missionaries had climbed to 116, the mission was divided into a north and south zone, missionaries were working in thirty-five cities, and convert baptisms since the establishment of the mission totaled eighteen.

One of the early challenges was lack of training and experience among the missionaries, most of whom had come from German-speaking missions or had just arrived in the mission field. The Language Training Mission had been established in 1963 in Provo, Utah, but would not include instruction in Italian until January 1969.<sup>55</sup> The mission history noted that “many elders were called to be senior companions when they had been in the mission only a few months and knew only a door approach and a screening discussion. At this time the mission’s biggest problem was finding elders who knew the language and the six discussions.”<sup>56</sup> Duns and his mission staff therefore adopted an innovative measure designed to provide new missionaries with training in Italian language and culture and proselytizing techniques. In September 1966, about six weeks after the new mission was opened, three language schools were established: first in Brescia, then in Florence and Bologna. Many of the new missionaries (“greenies,” or *verdini*, in mission slang) were assigned to one of these schools for four to six weeks. An experienced elder—normally one with exceptional Italian language skills—was assigned to be the teacher. The missionaries studied from the Jones grammar book<sup>57</sup> and practiced door approaches, prayers, and the missionary lessons in the mornings;

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<sup>55</sup>Rodney Boynton, Interviewed by James Toronto, June 11, 2004; notes in my possession; Richard O. Cowan, *Every Man Shall Hear the Gospel in His Own Language: A History of the Provo Missionary Training Center and Its Predecessors* (Provo, Utah: Missionary Training Center, 1984, 2001), chaps. 3–6.

<sup>56</sup>Historians (unnamed), “Italian Mission History,” 11.

<sup>57</sup>Frederic Joseph Jones, *A Modern Italian Grammar* (London: Univer-

then they went out to proselytize in the afternoons and evenings.<sup>58</sup>

Zone and district conferences throughout the mission were another means of supervising and motivating the missionary force. Duns, an energetic traveler, launched an all-out effort to visit each of the twelve districts and to interview every missionary. Accompanied by his wife and two members of the mission office staff, the party drove from Florence to Udine near the Austrian-Yugoslavian border, to Turin near the French border, and down both sides of the peninsula and around the island of Sicily. In the span of several weeks, they covered nearly 2,000 miles, maintaining an intense schedule of conferences and interviews.

Initially, Duns' responsibilities and travel included even areas beyond Italy. In January 1967 he succeeded, after numerous attempts, in visiting the Tripoli Branch in Libya. He reported that they held an enjoyable conference with the American members there but that "Tripoli was not very suitable for missionary work, and that the Mission would not be sending missionaries there."<sup>59</sup> After a meeting with Duns a few months later in May, Benson "decided that the Italian Mission would no longer be responsible for Greece and Northern Africa."<sup>60</sup>

Most missionaries responded to this fast-moving schedule by intensifying their own efforts, but the elders who had taken advantage of the "Wild West" autonomy by slackening their proselytizing schedules quickly learned that there was a new marshal in town. Although Duns's leadership style was not authoritarian, he took direct action to communicate more uniform expectations. He cracked down on missionaries in Italy who were "going all over the place and doing a lot of [unauthorized] things" more appropriate to tourists than missionar-

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sity of London Press, 1960).

<sup>58</sup>Boynton, Interview; Italian Mission, *The Challenger*, September 3, 1966, Italy Rome Mission, Publications, 1966-, LR 4142-20, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>59</sup>Historians (unnamed), "History of the Italian Mission," February 3, 1967; Italian Mission, *The Trumpet* 2, no. 5 (February 1, 1967): 7; M205.5 T772, Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

<sup>60</sup>*The Trumpet* 2, no. 19 (May 10, 1967): 2.



ies.<sup>61</sup> There was, for example, the issue of the *austflug* that had to be dealt with firmly. Lloyd Baird, a zone leader at that time, observed: “I had the dubious honor to stand up in district conferences and remind the missionaries that Paris and Zurich and the Matterhorn were not within our mission boundaries.” In addition to these public announcements, “I had to talk privately with several missionaries to curtail their visits outside the mission. We saw pictures of elders at some of these sites and had to take some action.”<sup>62</sup>

Mission publications occasionally published a list of mission rules that included admonitions to avoid activities such as “excessive radio listening,” visiting “more than one movie, opera, musical concert, or public entertainment each month,” walking “any person of the opposite sex home,” “swimming, skiing, and riding scooters,” and calling missionaries “by their first names or nicknames.”<sup>63</sup> Duns called a special meeting of the office staff in February 1968 to curtail problems of profanity and vulgarity among some missionaries and warned, “Severe steps will be taken against elders who violate the mission rule on profanity.” He also announced that “a firmer position” would be adopted in dealing with violations of other mission rules. In September of the same year, Duns summoned the missionaries of the Taranto and Milan districts to the mission office in Florence where he conducted personal interviews to warn them against flirting and inappropriate association with girls.<sup>64</sup>

Duns, like President Mabey before him, felt that the vast majority of missionaries were obedient and focused on missionary work. They were “excellent” in building up a positive image of the Church through teaching by example—how they acted and treated people.<sup>65</sup> The problems, in his view, did not result from laziness or succumbing

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<sup>61</sup>Duns, Oral History, 42.

<sup>62</sup>Baird, Interview.

<sup>63</sup>*The Trumpet* 2, no. 1 (January 3, 1967): 7; and *Life Line* 2, no. 2 (January 11, 1967): 5; M205.5 T772, Perry Special Collections.

<sup>64</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, February 8, September 24, 1968.

<sup>65</sup>Duns, Oral History, 59. President Christensen would later echo these same sentiments about the commitment of missionaries and the need to provide firm guidance. The greatest satisfaction for him and his wife, Rula, was “to see missionaries grow, change, learn to love the people and

wholesale to temptation but from a lack of preparation and proper motives on the part of some missionaries who came on a mission to please a parent or a social group, not because they were motivated by a desire to serve. Rather than taking a punitive approach, therefore, he sought “to settle” the missionaries when they got to Italy: to inspire them with a vision of what it meant to be a missionary, to acquaint them with mission rules, and to teach them how to share the message effectively.<sup>66</sup> Orientation meetings for new missionaries, zone and district conferences, mission newsletters, and personal interviews provided opportunities for such training that combined spiritual admonition and personal management training.

Topics in 1967 district conferences, for example, included religiously oriented discussions on desire and motivation to do the work, obeying mission rules, building personal testimony, effective door approaches, using the European Information Service (EIS—the Church’s public relations arm in Europe), and accelerating the pace of moving investigators toward baptism. But missionaries also heard presentations on personal goals, leadership and planning, cleanliness (taught by Sister Duns), managing finances, and time management. Duns interviewed each missionary during zone conferences and organized open-house sessions for Church members in each location to build missionary-member morale. On the lighter side, sometimes the missionaries played pick-up games of football between conference sessions, followed in the evenings by the popular American “hootenanny”—a group sing-along followed by refreshments.<sup>67</sup>

Another way of fostering esprit de corps and greater dedication to mission goals was contests to designate the “best” district and the most productive missionary companionships. The mission office proselyting staff (affectionately called MOPS) kept comparative statistics on proselytizing activities and hours, teaching time, and number of baptisms for each district and companionship. Missionary dis-

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the Gospel and their missions.” They enjoyed watching them “do what they’re supposed to do—though they often go around the barn to get there.” He had to send only one missionary home early who insisted on going without purse or scrip. Leavitt Christensen, interviewed by James Toronto and Rodney Boynton, June 21, 1995, Kanosh, Utah; notes in my possession.

<sup>66</sup>Duns, Oral History, 41.

<sup>67</sup>Italian Mission, Zone Conference Minutes, 1967–1968, LR 4142–26, LDS Church History Library.

tricts submitted goals for the number of baptisms per year, and graphs showing each district's progress toward these goals were published periodically. Prizes were not awarded, but results of the competition were published in the mission newsletter. Duns felt that "a little competitive spirit" was positive and didn't "hurt a bit"—it was one way to motivate his young missionaries who faced many hardships and struggled often with fear and discouragement.<sup>68</sup>

Mission leaders also made a concerted effort to provide greater structure and continuity in missionary work, to standardize policies and procedures, and to decentralize the mission organization to bring leadership closer to the missionaries spread across the peninsula. In March 1968, for example, "Diversion Day"—the day set aside each week for food shopping, letter writing, cleaning the apartment, washing clothes, and sightseeing—was standardized across the mission instead of allowing each missionary companionship to choose the day.<sup>69</sup> Subsequently, the name was changed to "Preparation Day" ("P-Day") to underscore appropriate missionary activities rather than a "diversion" from being a missionary.

The administrative structure of the mission evolved steadily as well. By March 1968, the mission's twenty-one districts were organized in five zones: (1) Padova, Trieste, Verona, and Brescia, (2) Pisa, Florence, Rome I, Rome II, Napoli, and Cagliari in Sardinia, (3) Modena, Milan, Genova, Turin I, and Turin II (4) Catania and Palermo in Sardinia, and (5) Taranto, Lecce, Bari, and Brindisi.

Communication with Italian members and non-English speaking missionaries was often a serious obstacle for mission presidents who usually spoke at best only rudimentary Italian. As the number of converts and missionaries continued to increase, the problem became more acute. By January 1968, when the missionary force reached 149 and spanned eleven countries,<sup>70</sup> Duns was often forced to play "a wonderful game of charades" in trying to communicate with his non-English-speaking missionaries and with the Italian members.<sup>71</sup> More fluent missionaries often acted as interpreters during meetings

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<sup>68</sup>Duns, Oral History, 66; Italian Mission, *Il Pioniere* 1, no. 15 (Early December 1966): 5, M205.5 T772, Perry Special Collections.

<sup>69</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, March 9, 1968.

<sup>70</sup>"South Americans in Italy," *Church News*, January 27, 1968, 4.

<sup>71</sup>Duns, Oral History, 26.

and interviews, but the resulting noise level frequently generated a problem of its own. A technological solution was attempted at the Brescia Branch conference in October 1966. It employed “a type of ‘United Nations’ translation technique” in which a missionary translated “using a microphone-amplifier setup which was connected to various headsets.” Although supplying the microphones and headsets was somewhat cumbersome, the translation itself “was very effective and eliminated the usual confusion which had distracted somewhat from previous conferences.”<sup>72</sup>

### EXPERIENCES WITH EVIL SPIRITS

Missionaries occasionally reported what they perceived to be experiences with evil spirits, which mission leaders took very seriously. Opposition or possession by unseen malevolent spirits, normally associated with the presence of Satan and his desire to thwart God’s work, had long been part of both early Christian and Mormon history.<sup>73</sup> Duns and his replacement, Leavitt Christensen, who served as mission president from March 1969 to March 1972, both received anxious communications from missionaries, both elders and sisters, in various cities—Verona, Rome, Brescia, and Naples—reporting strange illnesses, unexplained noises in their apartments, and chairs moving around in empty Church meeting halls. For example, in January 1968 Duns received an urgent telegram from the missionaries in Verona and drove to the city to investigate. The missionaries reported that they “had some rather trying experiences with evil spirits. They have heard mysterious footfalls, shufflings, etc. about the chapel. Drinking glasses have been breaking seemingly on their own.”<sup>74</sup>

Mormonism does not provide an elaborate or even a standard exorcism ritual, but Duns learned that one of the missionaries had

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<sup>72</sup>Historians (unnamed), “Italian Mission History,” 12.

<sup>73</sup>See, for example, Matthew 8:16, 8:28–32, 10:1; Mark 1:23–27, 5:2–19, 16:17; Acts 16:16–18. Early LDS missionaries in England also recorded harrowing encounters with Lucifer and his cohorts. James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 33–35.

<sup>74</sup>Duns, Oral History, 68–69; Italian Mission Manuscript History, January 30, 31, and February 1, 1968.

“commanded the evil spirits to leave, after which the elders felt considerably more comfortable.”<sup>75</sup> One companionship telephoned Christensen in January 1970 claiming “to have been attacked by an evil spirit.” They reported being awakened in the night with their pillows being pressed over their faces. They handled this alarming event by rising and saying a prayer together, and after that they “were not bothered anymore.”<sup>76</sup> The issue of evil spirits became so serious in one city that Duns considered closing it to missionary work. He visited the missionaries and “was there to see it” but decided against closure because he “didn’t want to take the branch out of that area.” Eventually Duns “found the solution to [this problem]” in the mission and “got it corrected.”<sup>77</sup>

The missionaries generally interpreted such supernatural events as a sign that “the Adversary,” alarmed at the success of their efforts, was directly attacking their work. Duns felt that pride and contention—both tools of Satan according to LDS doctrine—lay at the root of these problems. The root cause, he believed, was that missionaries were boasting about their successes in proselytizing, visiting Catholic churches and tourist sites, and arguing too much with Catholic priests. He and other mission leaders admonished missionaries to avoid invidious comparisons and acrimonious disputations which only generated strife, drove out the spirit of God, and created an angry atmosphere conducive to the powers of darkness.<sup>78</sup>

### PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Issues of a more mundane nature involved physical and emotional health related to poor personal hygiene, inadequate diet, and homesickness. For example, one elder became weak from excessive dieting because he was afraid his girlfriend would dump him if he gained too much weight. This unhealthy habit resulted in an illness so severe that he had to be sent home. Another elder was unable to tract because years of involvement in karate had resulted in fallen

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<sup>75</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, January 30, 31, and February 1, 1968.

<sup>76</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, January 23, 1970.

<sup>77</sup>Duns, Oral History, 68–69.

<sup>78</sup>Duns, Oral History, 67–68; Italian Mission Manuscript History, January 30–31 and February 1, 1968.

arches, making walking painful.

Duns believed that not every missionary was suited to tracting and proselytizing but could be given other meaningful assignments if problems arose. He was loathe to send missionaries home early and “tried every possible way to keep them here.” For example, when one elder refused to live mission rules, Duns brought him into the mission office as a clerk where he did excellent work. On another occasion, a missionary came to Duns with an already purchased plane ticket and said he needed to go home because of pressing family issues. After some discussion, Duns agreed. After dealing with the situation at home, the young man was allowed to return to Italy where he did well. Duns was sympathetic with the strains of missionary life, feeling that many people failed to realize how traumatized a missionary can feel “when he hears something from home that’s wrong.”<sup>79</sup>

#### THE REDEDICATION OF ITALY, NOVEMBER 1966

Four months after the organization of the Italian Mission, Apostle Ezra Taft Benson sent a detailed report to the First Presidency on November 23, 1966, describing the mission’s progress, and expressing optimism and suggestions about further growth. He concluded: “The missionary work is taking hold and the spirit of the missionaries is most satisfying.” He recommended, based on the mission’s results, “that the quota of missionaries in Italy be gradually built up to about 180” from its current base of about 100.<sup>80</sup>

As part of the same report, Benson detailed the prayer service that he had conducted in Torre Pellice in November 1966 to rededicate Italy for the preaching of the gospel, a solemn and joyous revitalization of the first dedication which Apostle Lorenzo Snow had conducted in Torre Pellice more than a century before on September 19, 1850. The ceremony had originally been scheduled for Florence in conjunction with a mission conference; but devastating floods, some of the heaviest in Italy’s history, had swept through northern Italy just

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<sup>79</sup>Duns, Oral History, 41–42.

<sup>80</sup>Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994), Report to First Presidency, November 23, 1966, MS 3038–2, LDS Church History Library. The First Presidency then consisted of David O. McKay, Hugh B. Brown, N. Eldon Tanner, Thorpe B. Isaacson, and Joseph Fielding Smith. Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Report, September 30, 1966.

a few days before the conference date, leaving Florence mired under three feet of mud without gas, heat, light, and water. Damage to priceless art and architecture treasures amounted to \$159 million dollars in Florence alone, and the cost to the nation as a whole was almost three billion dollars.<sup>81</sup>

Elder Benson directed that the conference and ceremony be changed to Turin that had largely been spared by the floods. Despite the flood-related transportation stoppages that prevented many missionaries from traveling to the dedication, thirty-five missionaries assembled for a conference on Thursday, November 10, in Turin with Elder Benson, his wife, Flora, John and Wanda Duns, and their twelve-year old daughter, Teri.<sup>82</sup> Following a number of talks on the progress of the work in Italy, the group drove in several vehicles to Torre Pellice near the Italian-French border about forty kilometers to the southwest. As the group traveled up into Pellice valley, the road became steeper and increasingly narrow and the villages more remote.<sup>83</sup>

Wanda Duns remembered that “President Benson sat with his lap full of papers, scanning the territory and reading from a historical description of the first dedication.” Benson “was anxious to rededicate in as close a proximity to where President Snow had stood as was possible to determine.”<sup>84</sup> The group had somewhat naively hoped that “Mount Brigham” would be indicated on a map or road sign. Lacking such an indicator, two elders were sent to inquire about its location from some local people, who had no information on the topic. However, the group continued to drive through the valley until

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<sup>81</sup>Benson, Report to First Presidency; Franco Nencini, *Firenze: I Giorni del Diluvio* (Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1966); Katherine Kressman Taylor, *Florence: Ordeal by Water* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967).

<sup>82</sup>“Dedicatory Prayer of Italy,” audio-recording of the meetings in Turin and Torre Pellice, AV 2391, and Italy Rome Mission (1974– ), “Mission Journals, 1966–78,” November 10, 1966, 16–17, LR 4142–21, both in LDS Church History Library. See also Teri Duns, “The Rededication of the Land of Italy,” photocopy of journal entry in my possession, courtesy of Teri Duns; James A. Toronto and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, “The LDS Church in Italy: The 1966 Rededication by Elder Ezra Taft Benson,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (2012): 82–100.

<sup>83</sup>Teri Duns, journal entry.

<sup>84</sup>Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 390–91.



*On a steep hillside near Torre Pellice, Apostle Ezra Taft Benson pronounces a prayer rededicating Italy for the preaching of the gospel in November 1966. Photo courtesy of LDS Church History Library.*

Benson indicated a hill and said, “I think we’ll climb here.” About three-fourths of the way to the top, Benson announced to the group that had struggled up the steep incline in the late afternoon light in their Sunday best clothes, “This is it, this is the spot!”<sup>85</sup>

The group sang several hymns, then Benson rededicated “the great nation of Italy” for the preaching of the gospel, noting that it had been 116 years since Lorenzo Snow’s first dedication. He invoked God’s blessings on Italy, its government, and its people: “We know, Heavenly Father, that Thou dost love Thy children and we have in our hearts a love for the Italian people as we assemble here today, and, Holy Father, we pray Thee that Thy blessings may be showered upon them.” He predicted “that this Thy work has a great future in this land of Italy,” and that “thousands of Thy children in this land will be brought into the truth and into membership in Thy great church and kingdom that has been restored to the earth.” Ac-

<sup>85</sup>Teri Duns, journal entry; Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 391.



knowledging that the Church “can prosper only in an atmosphere of freedom and liberty,” Benson continued, invoking blessings on Italy’s national leaders to the end that peace would be maintained, that the land would be shielded from “insidious forces which would destroy the free agency of man,” and that religious freedom would be promoted to allow new faiths in Italy the “freedom to present their cause and their beliefs.” Benson also implored the Almighty to temper the natural violence recently experienced in the floods so that “the sunshine of Thy Sweet Spirit” would cause “a resurgence of spirituality, a desire to seek for the truth.” The prayer ended with a vow, spoken on behalf of all the missionaries in Italy, to “rededicate our lives unto Thee and all that we have and are to the upbuilding of Thy Kingdom in the world and the furtherance of truth and righteousness among Thy people.”<sup>86</sup>

At the conclusion of the prayer, Teri Duns recalled, Benson continued for a few moments to look “solemnly into the heavens as tears streamed down his face.” As rain began to fall, the group sang “I Need Thee Every Hour” and “God Be with You till We Meet Again.”<sup>87</sup> Elder Benson’s personal account of this momentous day in his report to the First Presidency reads: “[In Torre Pellice] we climbed the mountain side and as near as we could determine, stood in approximately the same area where Elder Lorenzo Snow had dedicated the land [in 1850]. It was a beautiful setting, overlooking the lovely green valley—the moan of the beautiful, clear river reaching us from the distance and two mountain ranges beyond, with snow-capped mountains. Tears were shed as we received the witness that many . . . would now receive the Gospel. Songs of praise rang through the valley as villagers watched, curiously. It was a memorable and inspirational occasion.”<sup>88</sup>

Upon leaving the physical and spiritual heights of this experience, the Duns family returned to Florence to deal with the aftermath

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<sup>86</sup>Dedicatory prayer, audio recording; see also Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report ending December 31, 1966. Photos of the dedication and mission records indicate that Benson’s prayer was tape-recorded on site and transcribed a few days later in the mission office.

<sup>87</sup>Teri Duns, journal entry; Dedicatory prayer, audio recording.

<sup>88</sup>Benson, Report to First Presidency. In both his prayer and his report, Benson refrained from referring to the location he selected as the ex-

of the flooding. The mission home and office buildings were undamaged, but most of the missionaries had to be stationed outside Florence because potable water had to be trucked in from Bologna for the next thirty days. The Church supplied humanitarian assistance, in coordination with the Italian Red Cross, for flood victims “by sending goods and clothing to the people of Florence. Ninety cartons of shoes, clothes, and different supplies were airlifted from Salt Lake to New York by United Airlines, and from New York to Rome by Alitalia Airlines. . . . In all, the Church gave an estimated \$22,000 worth of goods to the people of Florence.” In addition, missionaries participated in the cleanup effort, wading through water in the downtown area and shoveling out the deep mud that had accumulated in the lower levels of stores and residences.<sup>89</sup>

#### OPENING CITIES AND ESTABLISHING BRANCHES: THE “SHOTGUN METHOD”

When he organized the mission in August 1966, Benson instructed Duns to “just go and build your strength in membership.” Duns interpreted this counsel to mean that he should look for cities where the missionaries could begin baptizing right away, organize small branches, and build up Italian leadership as quickly as possible. Because Duns was well acquainted with Italy and its regions from his previous years of residence and travel there, he adopted a strategy of dispersing missionaries across the whole country, rather than targeting only a few key cities. Benson described this approach of “scattering” missionaries throughout the peninsula as

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act site where Lorenzo Snow had offered the first dedicatory prayer. Instead, he mentions that the missionaries who assembled on November 10, 1966, stood “in the same vicinity” and “in approximately the same area” as Mount Brigham (known locally as Monte Vandalino) and the Rock of Prophecy (Monte Castelluzzo) where Snow and his companions had previously gathered. The actual site of the 1850 dedication is a remote, rocky location much higher up the rugged slopes of Vandalino that requires a strenuous hike of several hours. In 1997 Church members attached a brass plaque to a large boulder on Castelluzzo commemorating Snow’s prayer. That site has continued to be a pilgrimage destination for LDS members, missionaries, and tourists.

<sup>89</sup>Historians (Unnamed), “Italian Mission History,” November 6, 1966.

“the shotgun method.”<sup>90</sup>

The strategy involved sending one or more pairs of missionaries into a large city on a trial basis “to see what it was like, see whether we had any rhyme or reason, or then if we had problems.” In general, he assigned companionships in cities of 100,000 residents or more, with the intent of expanding outward to smaller cities. This approach allowed the Church to develop in districts sufficiently close that they could communicate relatively easily and travel to conferences. Many of the early converts lived on the outskirts of large cities and did not own cars, so the mission made a conscious effort “to get centrally located” so that members and investigators could use public transportation to come to meetings.<sup>91</sup>

Another important criterion was whether Italian or American Church members already resided in the target city. The Church members’ kinship/friendship networks and knowledge of the area always reinforced missionary activity and provided an important support system. A city would be closed and the missionaries moved out if new converts were slow in coming, or if the missionary companions “had a problem with girls or with each other.”<sup>92</sup> Many cities were opened, closed, then reopened later when circumstances became more promising.

Duns felt that the missionaries should not draw undue attention to themselves in opening new cities to avoid creating more problems for the Church. His concern was no doubt related to the somewhat ambiguous legal status of new religious movements in Italy at the time, opposition from local Catholic officials, and anti-Americanism in areas of Communist influence. When some of the missionaries suggested putting the name of the Church on the side of the mission cars for publicity, Duns refused, explaining rather that “we should try just to be one of the people, just try to mingle with the people” as much as possible. He also directed that, whenever possible, LDS meetings be held “at times that didn’t conflict with Catholic masses on Sundays.”<sup>93</sup>

After Benson’s 1966 rededication, Duns authorized missionar-

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<sup>90</sup>Duns, Oral History, 10–11, 44,

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 24, 43–44.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 23, 43.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 24.

ies to dedicate newly opened cities for the preaching of the gospel.<sup>94</sup> For example, mission histories record the ceremony for Rome on July 8, 1967: “Elders of the Rome District gathered on a wooded hill in one of the sections of this great city, for the purpose of dedicating the city for the preaching of the Gospel.” Elder John Abner (District Leader) led the group of ten missionaries in a religious service, “presenting unto the Lord the ancient city of Rome for His work in this dispensation. Elder Paul Toscano offered the dedicatory prayer.”<sup>95</sup>

Time and experience brought about some adjustments to the shotgun strategy. As small branches began to form, missionaries gradually consolidated their efforts, focusing on fewer but more fruitful cities. As it became clear early that growth would be more rapid in the south than in the north, more missionary resources shifted toward the southern provinces. Duns, reflecting later on the “shotgun strategy,” wondered if he should have concentrated his missionary force in either the north or the south, then gradually spread to outlying areas “instead of just going all over Italy.”<sup>96</sup> But while baptisms remained sparse for the first year or so, his decision was vindicated by an increasing baptismal rate in subsequent years, and statistics for the year 1970 indicated that five of the top six missionary districts in total baptisms were in southern Italy.<sup>97</sup> Duns noted in an interview that by 1975, just six years after his release, “the church is growing in the cities we opened” and three missions had been created in the zones he had established throughout Italy.<sup>98</sup>

#### “TEACHING THE GOSPEL FROM ALL ANGLES”

The central task that confronts LDS missionaries on a day-to-day basis is how to introduce their message to as many people as possible in ways that effectively address their most pressing issues, questions, and needs. As the number of LDS missionaries in Italy in-

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 79–80.

<sup>95</sup>Historians (unnamed), “History of the Italian Mission, July 8, 1967. See also Italy Rome Mission Manuscript History, July 8, 1967, Quarterly Historical Report ending September 30, 1967.

<sup>96</sup>Duns, Oral History, 43, 84–85.

<sup>97</sup>“2 Church Missions Will Now Serve Italy,” *Church News*, June 12, 1971, 5; *The Trumpet* 6, no. 1 (January 1971): 6.

<sup>98</sup>Duns, Oral History, 29, 84–85.

creased, mission leaders sought more innovative and, they hoped, more efficient means of winning converts. In Duns's estimation, the fundamental goal of establishing the Church in Italy required a two-pronged strategy: first at the macro level, to initiate long-term efforts to change the image of the Church, and second at the micro level, to improve methods of contacting and teaching individuals and families.

Perceptions of Mormonism in Italy, the missionaries soon learned, were stereotypical and negative, shaped largely by the American cinema which was enormously popular in Italy and generally portrayed Mormons as a nineteenth-century clandestine religion that practiced polygamy on the Western frontier. A major challenge, then, was to dispel the image of Mormons as a small "American cult out of Utah," instead communicating the changing reality of a mainstream religious community of growing influence worldwide. The "general overall plan," as Duns explained it, was to "stir up interest" by showing Italians the true nature of the Church—"that we're not there to disrupt their way of life. We're there to help them and to build their way of life." The missionaries wanted Italians to perceive Latter-day Saints as normal, law-abiding citizens who aspire to make positive contributions to the societies in which they live and who love music, art, education, and sports. They sought to portray the Church as a multi-faceted, progressive religious organization that "had a variety of programs for everybody to participate in."<sup>99</sup>

To this end, the missionaries undertook a number of activities that went beyond the traditional methods of door-to-door tracting, street boards, and member referrals. As a first step, Duns tapped into his extensive professional network in Italy, handing out Church books and Mormon Tabernacle Choir records to friends to arouse interest and arranging speaking engagements with former colleagues in the Italian government, military, and automotive industry. During one such meeting with former Italian colleagues in the Fiat conference room in Turin, he was favorably received and many sincere questions were asked about his present duties as a Mormon mission president. Duns concluded from these experiences, perhaps somewhat optimistically, that the Italians "were beginning to look for something. They

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 33, 71.

wanted something for their families that they didn't have."<sup>100</sup>

This personal effort was eventually transformed into a mission-wide proselytizing effort called the "VIP Program." This program consisted of inviting influential people to meet in the conference room of a five-star hotel for an "Encounter with the Mormons" (*Incontro con i Mormoni*) to learn about the Church and meet the Duns family. Italian members of the Church worked closely with the missionaries in planning and making the presentations. Often such VIPS saw the newly translated Church film, *Man's Search for Happiness*, originally made for the New York's World Fair in 1964, and discussion ensued. At one *Incontro*, seventy prominent lawyers, educators, and religious leaders viewed the film, and Duns then addressed the group, encouraging them "to think more seriously about the meaning of existence" and challenging them "to listen to the message of the missionaries." Reporters who covered the event wrote favorable articles in local newspapers.<sup>101</sup>

Another finding method dating from the earliest days of missionary work in Italy centered on musical presentations, which were used to improve public perceptions about the Church and to create an opening for religious dialogue. One of the earliest examples of this approach was the appearance on national TV of 107 missionaries who had gathered for a mission conference in Florence on December 23–25, 1966. They spent Christmas Eve singing carols in the city center "with the intent . . . to spread in song the Christmas spirit through a city which had recently been ravaged by floods." The group assembled at the main cathedral, the Duomo, and began singing Christmas carols and Mormon songs in English and Italian. Their singing attracted the attention of a BBC television crew in Florence to cover the Pope's visit later that evening. The BBC director requested that the group sing at Piazza Santa Croce to provide background music for the Pope's appearance at 9:00 P.M. It turned out that the Pope was an hour late. The missionaries seized this opportunity and sang for the large throngs who paid rapt attention while the TV crew trained their lights on the Mormon choir and filmed the impromptu concert, including a rendition of "Silent Night" in Italian. Several missionaries were interviewed by TV reporters in Italian about their activities in Italy. Ac-

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<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>101</sup>"Turin: Italian Plan Aids Work," *Church News*, December 23, 1967.



*The I Mormoni SUG basketball team, composed of missionaries, provided positive publicity for the LDS Church in Italy during the late 1960s when the Church was little known. Photo courtesy of Noel Zaugg.*

ording to two elders, “It was a huge success. We succeeded in getting the Italians near us to sing along.” The next day, images of the missionaries singing were broadcast over national television as were some of the interview segments. This gave “an unexpected boost” to spreading the gospel in Italy. With a touch of missionary hyperbole, reflecting the enthusiasm engendered by a sudden burst of public exposure after laboring in virtual anonymity, President Duns commented: “Florence will never be the same after tonight.”<sup>102</sup>

Because of their positive experience with the impromptu choir concert on Christmas Eve 1966, the missionaries sensed the potential of musical and sporting events in garnering media attention and, hence, in attracting wider exposure for their message. In August 1967 several elders were transferred to mission headquarters in Florence to join a newly formed mission basketball team, carrying the evangelically pragmatic name *I Mormoni SUG* (The Mormons LDS). The missionaries played against teams from universities and sporting clubs throughout Italy, normally in large cities already opened to mission-

<sup>102</sup>Henry A. Smith, “On TV in Italy,” *Church News*, January 14, 1967, 6.

ary work. Team members presented each opposing team with copies of the Book of Mormon and gave a brief explanation of the Church. Other missionaries working in the area would put on half-time shows (such as judo exhibitions), dress up as female cheerleaders to urge the team on to victory, pass out Church literature, and invite spectators to Church services.<sup>103</sup> During the late sixties in Europe, basketball was a sport that was just beginning to attract attention and participants; thus, even with little practice *I Mormoni* *SUG* managed to make a respectable showing.

In February 1968, after six months of competition, the mission basketball team officially disbanded, and the sports experiment was never revisited. The team's record was twenty wins and twenty-four losses; however, the winning percentage was secondary to the overall objective of spreading "the name and spirit of Mormonism in Italy through the new and fast-growing sport of basketball." A total of 176 copies of the Book of Mormon had been distributed, 90 newspaper articles had been published, and 13,000 spectators had attended their games.<sup>104</sup>

Another attempt to raise awareness and dispel myths about the Church was a "bold" public relations program, "Tri Summer sixty eight," that mission leaders hoped would "have a great effect on the future of the Italian Mission." It consisted of three parts: (1) the formation of a traveling talent group; (2) arranging for a visit by the BYU Folk Dancers to perform in a talent program in Venice and Rome; and (3) facilitating the broadcast of the Church's long-running radio program featuring the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and a brief interdenominational message, "The Spoken Word," over Italy's national radio network.<sup>105</sup>

In early March, three elders from mission headquarters began to tour the mission looking "for talented elders whom they may incorporate into their group as part of the European Information Service

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<sup>103</sup>"Italian Basketball," *Improvement Era* 71, no. 1 (January 1968): 72.

<sup>104</sup>Italy Rome Mission, Scrapbook, 1966–1974, LR 4142–25, fd. 10. A report two months earlier noted that the team had spent 40 days on the road and traveled over 5,000 miles, a city mayor had attended one game, 21 out of 25 games were played indoors, and one backboard was broken. Italian Mission, Mission Conference, December 1967, in Zone Conference Minutes, 1967–1968, LR 4142–26, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>105</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, February 18, 1968.



(EIS) ‘Tri Summer Sixty Eight’ program.” By the end of March, eight missionaries had been selected to form a musical ensemble, *I SUG Singers* (“The LDS Singers”), and they began to perform in cities throughout Italy. In Rome the *SUG Singers* performed in the private theater of a well-known Roman artist before an audience of about 150 “high society people,” including a TV producer who was impressed enough by the missionary troupe that he expressed interest in making a television show about the Mormons. In the Tuscany region, at the “first full-scale show they had staged,” the Singers performed to “a disappointing crowd of 150 in Teatro Dante in San Sepulcro [sic].” As with the basketball program, missionaries and members collaborated in setting up displays and distributing fliers for publicity, passing out Church literature to the audience, taking referrals, and scheduling teaching appointments. A recording of the group was produced in the FonoRoma studios in Rome and then distributed for public relations purposes.<sup>106</sup>

The mission’s public relations blitz also included coordinating and publicizing performances by music and dance groups from Brigham Young University and visits by LDS celebrities in Italy. In June 1968 BYU’s A Cappella Choir presented a concert to 425 people at the cathedral in Florence, drawn by the mission office’s heavy publicity. The BYU Folk Dancers were a big hit when they performed in a park in Rome because of the Italian fascination with the American West. In December 1968, Mormon boxer Don Fullmer came to Sanremo, Italy, to fight a re-match with the reigning middleweight champion, Nino Benvenuti. Though he lost the fight, at Duns’s invitation Fullmer spoke to the press about the Church. As a result “hundreds of articles appeared in Italian newspapers and magazines, most of which publicized the fact that Fullmer is a Mormon.”<sup>107</sup>

Missionaries catered to the Italian love of cinema by regularly showing free movies to the public, often at youth-targeted MIA meetings, which elicited positive exposure for the Church. The Italian translation of *Man’s Search for Happiness* was particularly successful. Typically, two EIS (public relations) elders from the mission office in Florence would tour the mission, showing the film in venues prearranged by the local missionaries and members and publicized through press releases, leaflets, and street meetings. Sometimes

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., March 9, May 28, June 27 and 28, 1968.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., June 22, December 9, 1968.

other films were shown, and the public was invited without coordination from mission headquarters. The missionaries soon learned, however, about regulations against showing films in public that were designed to protect local movie theaters' business. Required to apply for permits, they encountered stonewalling from government officials who hoped the missionaries would give up. However, the intervention of an influential Church member who worked in the film distribution industry, Aldo Cuffaro, usually expedited the process.<sup>108</sup>

Despite these obstacles, the free LDS movies were enormously popular. Duns reported that the Church movies were “a great curiosity” to the Italians, and so the missionaries showed movies “up and down throughout all of our mission,” often to standing-room only audiences. In one city the missionaries presented two showings of a film, and people “were sitting out on the street looking through the windows at it. It was packed so full they had brought the chairs and everybody was sitting out there and watching it all around the building” through the big plate glass windows in front.<sup>109</sup>

In February 1967 in Catania, five months after the missionaries first began proselytizing, viewing films at Thursday night MIA had become a successful means of stirring up interest in the Church. At one showing of *Man's Search for Happiness*, forty-nine people—most of them investigators who had walked in off the street after seeing the publicity—crowded into the small LDS meeting place. Missionaries reported an enthusiastic response, with several of the investigators coming back two days later to attend a baptismal service and then requesting baptism themselves.<sup>110</sup> In one instance a near-riot ensued when police in Palermo tried to prevent the Mormon missionaries from showing films in public. Leavitt Christensen happily reported: “In Palermo the police stopped the street meetings because it was packing too many in and they contended that the preaching was against the Catholic Church. The elders didn't stop at first so the police hauled them off to jail and then riots broke out (small ones) between the people and the police. The elders had to calm the people

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<sup>108</sup>Duns, Oral History, 44–45, 70–71; Italian Mission Manuscript History, May 21, 1968.

<sup>109</sup>Duns, Oral History, 44–45, 70–71.

<sup>110</sup>Henry A. Smith, “From the Church Editor's Desk,” *Church News*, March 4, 1967, 6.

down by saying that they would be back after they went to the court house and got things straightened out.”<sup>111</sup>

Despite the success of these innovative proselytizing efforts, Duns and other mission presidents who had been sponsoring musical and athletic groups for public relations purposes received instructions from Church headquarters to discontinue these activities and to reemphasize “the normal missionary program,” while shifting public relations as much as possible to the Italian members. Duns reported that this mandate came from Thomas S. Monson, the apostle newly assigned to supervise the Germanic and Italian missions, at a mission presidents’ seminar in Germany in July 1968. This policy marked the end of a two-year period in which missionaries experimented extensively with unconventional programs to change public attitudes about the Church in Italy and to attract attention to their message.<sup>112</sup> In addition to dissolving the mission’s musical and athletic groups, the new policy on proselytizing stipulated that the size of the mission office staff be reduced and that they do missionary work in the evenings. Duns summed up the approach during this early time: “We were teaching the gospel from all angles. . . . I think we tried everything that we possibly could.”<sup>113</sup>

In tandem with improving perceptions of the Church, mission leaders attempted to improve proselytizing effectiveness at the individual level. One tactic was to increase the number of daily work hours both to contact more people but also to reduce missionaries’ idle time. The “65-40” program required each companionship to spend 65 hours weekly in contacting activities and 40 hours teaching.

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<sup>111</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, Easter 1967, Christensen papers.

<sup>112</sup>The abrupt change of policy may have been connected to unconventional tactics, such as proselytizing incentives and competitions, adopted by a number of missions in Europe during the late 1950s and 1960s. According to one study, this “radically different approach” to seeking converts “left an indelible though controversial imprint on the church in Europe” because it adversely impacted conversion, retention, and missionary morale. Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 228. Chapter 10, “The Missionary Program,” provides a detailed discussion of these issues.

<sup>113</sup>Duns, Oral History, 27, 36, 45, 71–72; Italian Mission Manuscript History, July 30, 1968.

Another initiative, introduced in the summer of 1968 and dubbed the “Concentration Program,” sought to provide greater support for investigators, to answer their questions, alleviate their doubts, and keep them in frequent contact with the missionaries. Its purpose was to counteract negative peer and family pressure. Under this program, missionaries were to visit “golden contacts”—those showing sincere interest in conversion—nearly every day for five or ten minutes: time enough to drop off a Church pamphlet, answer a question, read a scripture, or have a prayer together. In August 1968, this program was credited with helping achieve a milestone—twenty-four baptisms in one month, the highest number recorded since the organization of the mission two years before.

Another program was designed to find the sincerely interested but avoid those who wanted only to befriend or debate the missionaries and who had no real interest in conversion. Called “Meet, teach, and baptize in three weeks,” the plan encouraged missionaries to decide quickly whether to teach a person or move on to someone else. It operated on the rationale that many people had not heard the message, there were few missionaries to teach it, and that “the time was going fast.” Duns stated that some of the impetus for emphasizing traditional methods and streamlining the teaching process came because “pressure was being applied by Church headquarters to match the success of South American missions.”<sup>114</sup> Apparently, senior Church leaders had noticed that missionary work was moving rapidly among Italians in South America and concluded that proselytizing in Italy could see similar results.<sup>115</sup>

Teaching the gospel “from all angles,” as Duns called it, included introducing Italians to the Church’s lay organization which

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<sup>114</sup>Duns, Oral History, 69.

<sup>115</sup>Italy Rome Mission, “Publications,” General Minutes, 1968–, minutes of the member conference held at Piazza Vescovio 3/3, Rome, November 5, 1968, LR 4142–11, LDS Church History Library. Some studies have argued that LDS proselytizing in South America produced impressive baptismal statistics but with high reversion to inactivity. See, for example, David Clark Knowlton, “How Many Members Are There Really? Two Censuses and the Meaning of LDS Membership in Chile and Mexico,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 59; Rick Phillips, “Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 10, no. 1 (August 2006): 52–68.

emphasizes individual participation and group fellowship. Many Italians found this innovation appealing when contrasted to a religious context in which the clergy assumed most of the program responsibilities. The LDS Church's program included organizations and activities targeted at both men and women and at all ages, and stressed the responsibility of being an active participant rather than a passive observer.

Two of these organizations proved especially attractive in Italy: the Primary, which was directed at children under age twelve, and the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA), which focused on teens. The Primary organization, which met on a weekday after school, quickly became popular not only among the few member families with children still in the home but also with many non-Mormons who liked the idea of religious instruction designed just for children. According to Duns, "You'd hold a Primary [in Italy] and we'd pack the place full. You wouldn't believe the number of youngsters that wanted to come to Primary. They'd just absorb it. And then we were hoping that through them they'd take it home. . . . We touched more people through the Primary than anything."<sup>116</sup>

The MIA program for young adults also proved successful in attracting interest. Indeed, mission leaders tried to ensure that it was functioning as quickly as possible in all areas. MIA was held on a week night, and activities might include discussion of current events and religious topics, instruction on vocational and practical matters, games, singing, dancing, talent shows, and performing plays and skits. Members and investigators attended these social events in such numbers that, as Duns commented, "some nights we'd begin to wonder whether we would be able to handle all of it."<sup>117</sup>

Another staple of Mormon proselytizing was the member-missionary program, which encouraged converts to tap into their kinship and friendship networks to find new investigators for the missionaries to teach. Much of the growth in the early years of the mission can be attributed to the involvement and support of new converts who enthusiastically invited family, friends, and colleagues to Church activities. Leavitt Christensen proudly reported that a "livewire" branch president in Catania "was sick in the hospital for several days and by the time he recovered he had all the hospital staff singing hymns and

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<sup>116</sup>Duns, Oral History, 26, 64.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

had a long list of referrals for the missionaries.”<sup>118</sup>

Despite the efforts of missionaries to teach and baptize entire families, the majority of early converts in Italy were young, single Italians or couples who were willing to explore new alternatives in their personal spirituality. In both cases, these converts were less restricted than their parents to traditional beliefs and practices. “It seems natural,” Christensen observed, “wherever the Church has gotten a start, that the young people are attracted first. The Lord seems to reach the young first, those who have not been so engrained with their beliefs. We are getting many young families, as well as individuals, from our missionary efforts.”<sup>119</sup>

During his second term as president of the European Mission (1964–65), Ezra Taft Benson encouraged national-level youth conferences in each country as a means of meeting members’ social needs and of solidifying the Church presence. According to one LDS historian, such gatherings became a key to Church growth and “a staple of the Church in Europe.”<sup>120</sup> In Italy, these annual events were highly effective in bolstering the commitment and religious identity of the early converts and in bringing positive exposure for the new LDS community. The first annual youth conference of the Italian Mission was held in Rome in August 1968 and brought together members, missionaries, and investigators from branches all over Italy. For two days, the participants enjoyed their first real opportunity to connect with other young Latter-day Saints, singing, dancing, and eating together; discussing leadership, dating, and marriage; examining problems facing society; and sharing religious convictions and perspectives. Entertainment was provided by the BYU Folk Dancers, who performed at Villa Ada in Rome as part of their European tour, and by the mission’s *SUG* Singers. Attendance at the general session on Sunday morning was 125, including seventy-seven Italians (many of whom were not Mormons), thirty-five missionaries, seven Americans, and six children. Conference minutes summed up the event: “The

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<sup>118</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, Easter 1967.

<sup>119</sup>Leavitt Christensen, quoted in “2 Church Missions Will Now Serve Italy,” *Church News*, June 12, 1971, 5.

<sup>120</sup>Bruce A. Van Orden, *Building Zion: The Latter-day Saints in Europe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 182–83. See also Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 379.

strength of the church in Italy after only two years of active missionary work was manifested by the beautiful, simple, powerful testimonies of the Italian brothers and sisters.”<sup>121</sup>

By early 1969, significant changes in mission leadership had occurred. Leavitt Christensen, who had served as first counselor in the mission presidency, had left Italy in October 1967 and was replaced by Dan Jorgensen, an American banking executive working in Milan. In an unexpected turn of events, President Duns attended a mission presidents’ seminar in Germany on February 15, 1969 and, upon his return to Florence, announced that he had been released. He was replaced temporarily by Hartman Rector Jr., who was appointed to the First Quorum of the Seventy in 1968 and assigned to work with Thomas S. Monson . Duns offered no specific explanations for his release, which came five months before the end of his three-year tenure, except to say that his wife was having some health problems and that Rector, as a new General Authority, needed some first-hand experience in the mission field. Rector served for about six weeks before Leavitt and Rula Christensen returned in March 1969 to assume the presidency of the mission. The mission office staff held a testimony meeting to welcome the Christensens. The first “greenies” who had received training in Italian from the Language Training Mission (later Missionary Training Center) at BYU, arrived in Florence on the same day.

Despite the challenges of a vast geographical area, a cadre of missionaries who were initially inexperienced in dealing with Italian culture, and a degree of opposition at the local level from Catholic priests and government officials, Mormonism had begun to win some converts and to establish an institutional presence in Italy. Missionaries experimented with a variety of strategies for proselytizing Italians and for heightening awareness and improving the image of Mormonism in a country where it barely registered on the religious barometer. Italy’s evolving spiritual marketplace and political environment for church-state relations aided this effort as did the resilience and courage of religious seekers—“pioneer converts”—who resisted generations of family and social tradition in joining a new and widely misunderstood religious movement.

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<sup>121</sup>Italy Rome Mission, “Publications,” General Minutes, 1968– , Italian Mission First Annual Youth Conference, Hotel Pio XII, Rome, August 3–4, 1968, LR 4142–11, LDS Church History Library.

### ITALIAN PRESS REACTION TO THE GROWING LDS PRESENCE

In a *Church News* article published in August 1966, about two weeks after the reestablishment of the mission, Ezra Taft Benson observed that “the Church is on the map” in Europe and credited Italian news media for providing coverage of Church growth and “greatly aiding its proselyting program.”<sup>122</sup> A sampling of articles that appeared in the Italian press in the months following the mission organization and rededication supports that assertion.<sup>123</sup> The content and tone of coverage in the press indicate that Italians were curious about the growing presence of the LDS Church in their midst but also reacted with fascination, amusement, and annoyance at the implausibility of a new religion like Mormonism—which they viewed as an obscure and bizarre American sect—attempting to insert itself in Italy’s religious space. Sometimes press coverage resulted from the missionaries’ tactic of paying a visit to local newspaper offices and introducing themselves to reporters and editors, but normally it came as an unsolicited effort on reporters’ part to simply do their job of covering news and events in society.

In general, Italian journalists were professional in their coverage, attempting to represent the doctrines and history of the Church with objectivity and accuracy (despite occasional factual errors that occurred from relying on secondary source material). They sometimes offered the Church a chance to print a response. Several themes emerged in the press coverage of LDS evangelism in Italy: Mormonism’s historical ties to the American frontier and polygamy; the LDS dietary and health code (Word of Wisdom); the volunteer and lay aspect of LDS experience; and the perception of the LDS Church as an American religious movement with vast financial resources. A survey of press coverage in the late 1960s provides insights

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<sup>122</sup>Ezra Taft Benson, quoted in “Church Is on the Map,” *Church News*, August 27, 1966, 6. Soon after the August 1966 organization of the Italian Mission, the Church employed a clipping service, “L’Eco della Stampa,” in Milan that sent photocopies of articles on Mormonism from newspapers around Italy to the mission office.

<sup>123</sup>The newspaper articles analyzed in this section are part of a large file of articles I have assembled from a variety of sources, primarily mission archives and histories. The specific articles discussed here are located in “The Italian Mission” (1966–71), Manuscript History and Historical Reports, LR 4140–2, LDS Church History Library.



into both the challenges faced by Mormon missionaries in dealing with Italian biases and stereotypes and the internal issues that Italians were grappling with as their society encountered an array of new, competing products in the religious marketplace.

On September 18, 1966, a popular weekly magazine in Vicenza, *Domenica del Corriere*, published an article by Cesare Marchi, “A Family of Sicilians Has Become Mormon.”<sup>124</sup> Later that month the mission historical report recorded that, as a result of this publicity, “a literal tidal wave of correspondence flooded into the Mission Offices” requesting more information about the “Mormon religion.”<sup>125</sup> It was one of the earliest attempts in Italian print media to document the rise of Mormon evangelism and to explore its implications in Italy’s evolving religious climate.

The article describes in detail and in present tense the curious scene of a Mormon baptism. The Cappitta family is originally from Sicily but lives now in Verona. The father, mother, and two children ages eleven and fourteen, barefoot and dressed in white, stand beside a pool of green water in a rock quarry outside the city of Cittadella (near Vicenza). With the Brenta River and piles of gravel as a backdrop and with the rumble of trucks passing nearby, the Italians and some Americans from the U.S. military base at Vicenza proceed with the ceremony, forming a circle and performing the baptism by immersion. The two American missionaries who conduct the simple rite are also dressed in white—two college students who had interrupted their studies to enroll in the army of 12,000 Mormon missionaries who “make propaganda” for their church around the world. In exchange for giving up smoking, alcohol, tea, coffee and, other stimulants, the newly baptized converts became “saints.” Moreover, in the LDS Church, “everyone is considered a priest.”<sup>126</sup>

Amazed that the Mormon missionaries could actually be laboring in the extremely Catholic area of Vicenza, Marchi attributes their presence and ability to find a few converts to the Church’s American origins and connections. The reason for this is clear, he opines, when

<sup>124</sup>Cesare Marchi, “Una Famiglia di Siciliani Si É Fatta Mormone,” *Domenica del Corriere*, Settembre 18, 1966, copy in Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, September 30, 1966.

<sup>125</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, September 30, 1966.

<sup>126</sup>Marchi, “Una Famiglia di Siciliani.”

one remembers that the Mormons “make use of that huge psychological and organizational platform provided by the American families” of the nearby U.S. military base.<sup>127</sup> Mormonism’s image in Italy as an American religion and the Church’s continual efforts to counter that perception by emphasizing its international character would remain a persistent theme in LDS history over the next fifty years.

The article concludes with the reporter’s query of “what the Catholic ecclesiastical authority might think about this [LDS] proselytism.” He points out that Vatican II “has thrown wide open windows and gates” in Italy for greater circulation of ideas and a more open discussion of the freedom of individual conscience. He interviewed Monsignor Ofelio Bison, Director of the Catechistic Office of the Diocese of Vicenza, who with equanimity and candor offered his explanation of Mormon proselytizing success and revealed something of the official Catholic attitude toward new religious movements:

Here the character of the Italians, who love novelties, comes into play a little bit. Then you add to this their scant knowledge of religious doctrine and their minimal knowledge of catechism. For people weak in religion, it is easy to let yourself be pulled off course. Another thing that needs to be added is that these American missionaries are lavish in giving charity and have at their disposal conspicuous financial means. Charitable largesse is an excellent hook (*ottimo aggancio*) for initiating discourse of a religious nature.

Q: Is this proselytism at a level today to cause worries?”

A: I would say no. It doesn’t worry us, but it does cause us pain. [Converts to other faiths] are sheep who no longer return to the fold.

Q: What defensive action do you believe the Catholic Church could put into effect to check the [Mormon] offensive?

A: It is not necessary to speak dramatically either of offensive or counteroffensive. We cannot coerce the conscience of anyone; everyone is free to choose. We limit ourselves to carrying out our own agenda.<sup>128</sup>

According to Marchi and Monsignor Bison, then, Mormonism’s attractiveness derives from Italians’ fascination with novelty, their weak foundation in Catholic doctrine, and the beneficence and financial resources available to the missionaries and their converts through their American connections.

In December 1966, Cagliari’s *Unione Sarda* newspaper re-

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

ported on “another Christian sect for whom we are a mission field” and announced “the arrival of the first missionaries of this strange sect [the Mormons] in Italy” who will soon be knocking on our doors.<sup>129</sup> The Italian fascination with the Mormons’ saga of settling the American West is evident, and the journalist; Fabio Bertini, highlighted the Mormon reputation for hard work and social justice, praising the Mormons as strong pioneers who made the harsh valleys of the Rocky Mountains blossom. He launched into a musing sidetrip, triggered by the state of Utah, noting that cities, rivers, and mountains had biblical names as do newspaper mastheads and advertising on street benches. The Mormons, who form 90 percent of Utah’s population, commented Bertini, believe that America and Utah are the “new Promised Land . . . the new Zion” and anticipate Jesus’s second coming and millennial reign. It is part of their sacred duty to contribute to social and economic well-being, build churches and public buildings, take care of the poor and the needy, and keep a year’s supply of food and provisions in case of famine.

Bertini also interviewed an unnamed Mormon Church leader to explain the Church’s lay ministry and missionary work. The fact that all young men become priests and that “there is no difference between members and clergy” is an attractive aspect of Mormonism, the official asserted. He described how, by age twenty-one, many young people enter missionary service at their own expense, with support from the local LDS community who raise money by auctioning books, fruit, flowers, pets, candy, and used items. Bertini, with a slightly incredulous tone, summarized: “So the young ‘cowboy’ learns to wear a necktie and low-cut shoes, to preach the gospel, and finally to go on a mission with a companion. . . . These are the people who will soon arrive to knock on our doors. Who would have ever thought [*Chi ci avrebbe detto*] that even Italy would become a mission field for the Mormons?”<sup>130</sup>

A month later, an article from a newspaper in Bergamo (between Brescia and Milan) described a debate between four Mormon

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<sup>129</sup>Fabio Bertini, “I Mormoni alla Porta,” *Unione Sarda*, December 7, 1966, also published under the name of Fabio Pierini on December 14, 1966, in *Corriere del Ticino* (Lugano) with the subtitle: “Un’altra Setta Cristiana per la Quale Siamo Terra di Missione”; copy in Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, December 31, 1966.

<sup>130</sup>Bertini, “I Mormoni alla Porta.”

missionaries and a group of local university students. The encounter reflects the ambivalent attitudes that Italians often evinced during this period toward the LDS Church and its connection to the United States: curiosity about why the missionaries had come to Italy, admiration for some aspects of American culture, and distaste for U.S. foreign policy and involvement in the Vietnam War. The theme of the debate was “Differences between American and European culture.” Questions that the missionaries fielded from the audience included how they spent their spare time and how U.S. colleges were organized. It was, according to the reporter, an interesting evening during which “the atmosphere heated up” as the exchange of opinions took place. The meeting ended with the missionaries showing slides depicting their life in the United States.<sup>131</sup>

Two missionaries visited the offices of the *Messaggero Veneto* in Udine in April 1967 to introduce themselves and their new faith to the newspaper staff. The article stressed the novelty of having two young Mormon missionaries in town and accurately presented the Church’s beliefs, but in a tone that mixed respect, amusement, and skepticism. The editors of this regional newspaper clearly understood that the incursion and recruitment efforts of new religious groups in deeply Catholic Veneto was a controversial issue but still felt a professional obligation to report news objectively.<sup>132</sup>

With its readership’s sensibilities in mind, the article opens with a half-apologetic caveat: that newspapers are a magnet for unusual people and ideas, and the Mormons are making an announcement of something new. The unnamed reporter commented that he had been aware for several days of the two young men of “mystical aspect” who rode motor scooters from street to street and house to house, holding direct discussions about their doctrine with families. Their Italian, he noted, is “characteristic” of foreigners but quite “comprehensible.” In identifying their title as “Elder,” the author wryly underscored the irony: “That’s exactly what they said: Elder. And so we see that indeed everything is relative in this world because the first missionary is 25

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<sup>131</sup>“Dibattito fra Studenti al Circolo Bocconiano,” *Giornale di Bergamo*, January 27, 1967; copy in Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, September 30, 1967.

<sup>132</sup>“I Mormoni in Città,” *Messaggero Veneto-Udine*, April 6, 1967; copy in Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, December 31, 1968.

and the second is even younger so that, adding their ages, it's not even half a century."<sup>133</sup>

The article identified Duns as the presiding officer, observed that the mission headquarters were in Florence, gave the address of the missionaries in Udine, then summarized their message: "We were interested in knowing what, in particular, one must do to be considered a good Mormon. Here it is: one must not smoke, it is prohibited to drink hot drinks, above all tea and coffee. And wine, we asked, can you drink wine? Oh no, they answered. We drew the conclusion that in the next two years—with all the respect that is due to the message and to the two missionaries—there will not be many Mormons in Udine."<sup>134</sup>

Shortly after this article appeared, the newspaper *La Sicilia* reported on Mormon evangelization in Catania but with much less objectivity and restraint. While the basic facts were more or less accurate, the author's attitude was obviously hostile, his prose dripped with antipathy and sarcasm, and his interpretation of LDS teachings and missionary work was distorted and sensationalized. The Mormons, he announced, had "come ashore" at Piazza Verga in the heart of Catania and set up a "trivial [Lilliputian] sacred display" (referring to the missionaries' street board) on a little plywood table. The subheading stated that ten missionaries from Utah and Arizona were attempting to convert others, perhaps by evoking "the mirage of polygamy."<sup>135</sup>

After a summary of Mormon history, the reporter critiqued the Book of Mormon as a literary work lacking "elevated or poetic sentiments," full of "naïve assertions and anachronisms," and composed in a "monotonous and pretentious" style. The principles of the Mormon Church, he continued, are a "mix of Judaism, Hinduism and Paganism, even Islam: a real muddle (*guazzabuglio*) of ingredients" which he found "spicy (polygamy), alluring (the Mormon welfare program with indefatigable workers who provide for

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<sup>133</sup>"I Mormoni in Città," *Messaggero Veneto-Udine*, April 6, 1967; copy in Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, December 31, 1968.

<sup>134</sup>"I Mormoni in Città."

<sup>135</sup>"I Mormoni in Piazza Verga: 'Mostra Sacra' su una Tavoleta di Compensato," *La Sicilia*, April 18, 1967; copy in Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, September 30, 1967.

the poor and needy), and happy (dance halls, choirs, folklore shows, and social gatherings).” The journalist returned to the theme of polygamy in his conclusion, implying that Mormonism is a pseudo-religion that cannot be taken seriously: It prohibits the use of tobacco, alcohol, tea, and coffee, on the one hand, but does not disapprove of the fact that Joseph Smith left behind twenty-seven widows when he was assassinated. Clearly, he opined, the Mormons intend to seduce Sicilians, especially men, to convert by captivating them with polygamy: “The missionaries, including two women, attempt with this puny exhibit to convert the citizens of Catania. To succeed—because they are in Sicily, land of the “wom-anizers” [*galli*, roosters]—they depend on the temptations of polygamy. But this is forbidden by law here, so the *galli* will have to reject it.”<sup>136</sup>

In May 1967, two Mormon elders met with reporters in Brescia and explained how they had been treated in Italy, their philosophy of seeking converts, religious beliefs, and views on controversial political and social issues. The two elders provided articulate, measured responses to the journalists’ questions. “We’ve been accepted and treated well so far,” the missionaries observed. “We’re not here to impose Mormonism, but to make it known. We believe every person has the right to follow the religion he prefers, to worship what and how he wishes.”<sup>137</sup> The reporters then posed questions of “vibrant currency” in Italy concerning divorce and the war in Vietnam. The missionaries, having been coached in how to deal with these volatile issues, offered a discreet response: “We allow divorce although it happens rarely in our church. It would take a long time to explain our position on Vietnam. Many Mormons are in the armed services in Vietnam. We believe that every person and every government must respond in their own way.”<sup>138</sup>

Journalist Crescenzo Guarino wrote a series of three articles that appeared March 1–3, 1968 in the newspaper *Roma* under the title, “The Mormons: The Bible on Horseback,” giving extensive cover-

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>Sergio Castelletti, “A Brescia Due Missionari Mormoni: 35 Proseliti al ‘Verbo’ di Smith,” *Brescia Notte*, May 24, 1967; copy in Italian Mission Manuscript History, Quarterly Historical Report, December 31, 1968.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

age to the Church's early activities in Italy. President Duns sent copies to Ezra Taft Benson, and the *Church News* subsequently printed a summary of the articles. A note from Duns to Benson, enclosed with the articles, characterized the reporter's presentation as "very fair and just" and pointed out that "most of his facts are surprisingly accurate for Italy." Headings to the articles highlighted themes that typically captivated Italian writers and readers: settling the Old West, the practice of polygamy, worldwide evangelism, and an austere code of life that seemed hopelessly incompatible with Italian culture. "The Puritans who prohibit wine and tobacco but appreciate a beautiful woman," Guarino observed with irony, "hope to convert all of Italy. In the panorama of the minority religions of our country, a new movement has appeared: this North American Protestant faith has sent 18,000 missionaries all over the world." The third article in the series asked how the Mormon missionaries, who consider coffee an "ungodly sin," will ever "have luck in a country that, from dawn to dusk, is a steaming coffee pot?"<sup>139</sup>

Taken together, these newspaper articles from various geographic regions reflect something of the religious and political ferment that characterized this transitional period in modern Italian history. They show that, in many respects, Italy presented a social and juridical climate conducive to the introduction of new religions. Italians, in spite of their fixation on Mormonism's association with polygamy and the mystique of the American West, were curious about the activities of the missionaries, open to discussion and debate about religious questions, and impressed by the historical LDS commitment to building prosperous close-knit communities and taking care of the poor.

In other respects, however, the questions and reactions of Italian journalists indicated that the LDS Church's ability to make a place for itself in Italy's religious space would constitute a formidable undertaking. Although Mormons and other new religious movements would make some inroads in Italian society, traditional identities and loyalties to Catholicism would see little change over the next several decades. Italian repugnance for Mormonism's connection to polygamy and its emphasis on ascetic health practices and high participa-

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<sup>139</sup>Crescenzo Guarino, "The Mormons: The Bible on Horseback," *Roma*, March 1-3, 1968, summarized in "Italian Paper Tells Story of the Church," *Church News*, March 30, 1968, 7.



*The weekly magazine Amica, published in Milan, featured missionaries in their signature white shirts on its cover shortly after a second mission was created in July 1971. The “vanguard” of 180 missionaries has arrived, the journalist observes, and “the army is at the doors.” Photo courtesy of James Toronto.*

tion for Church members would also hinder missionary efforts. The LDS Church’s image as an American organization elicited mixed reactions in Italy: Italian fondness for American culture often provided openings for the missionaries, but strong anti-Vietnam War sentiment and widespread sympathy for Communist and Socialist ideologies frequently created tensions.



### THE “BLOSSOMING OF THE ROSE” IN ITALY

The inaugural issue of the mission’s monthly Italian-language magazine, *La Stella*, appeared in June 1967 with the translation of an article by Henry A. Smith, editor of the *Church News*. In reporting on the progress of missionary work in Italy, Smith quoted a letter from the mission office staff in Florence that makes the earliest-known reference in mission literature to what came to be known as the “rose prophecy”: “Many years ago Lorenzo Snow, an early missionary to Italy, made a prophecy that the day would come when Italy ‘would blossom as a rose’. That day must be here. Just as with a real rose, the growth has started slowly, almost imperceptibly, but it is accelerating rapidly and will soon burst into the splendor of full bloom. We are now in the stage of relatively slow, but sure development. That prophecy is now bearing fruit.”<sup>140</sup> From this first-known mention, the rose prophecy became a recurring theme in subsequent mission discourse, though documents contemporary with Snow do not mention it.

The sanguine predictions of success made in 1965 by the missionaries when proselytism began anew gradually gave way to a more cautious view based on deeper experience with the surrounding socio-religious reality. Church leaders continued for a time to maintain expectations for growth in Italy based on comparisons to high rates of conversion in other Latin Catholic countries. For example, minutes of a conference held in Rome at Piazza Vescovia 3/3 on November 5, 1968, record the rationale of Church leaders in linking expectations of Church expansion in Italy to successes in South America. Apostle Thomas S. Monson, speaking to about ninety members, missionaries, and investigators, observed that “some of the best spots in the world for missionary work are in Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil where the people are joining by the thousands. The biggest part of these converts are Italian or of Italian descent. Many of the leaders are Italian.” He assured his listeners: “Soon you will have large

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<sup>140</sup>*La Stella* 1, no. 1 (June 1967), in Italy Rome Mission, Publications, CR 4142-20, Vol. 4, LDS Church History Library. For translated excerpts, see Henry A. Smith, “As We See It: From the Church Editor’s Desk,” *Church News*, March 4, 1967, 6. See also Henry A. Smith, “As We See It: From the Church Editor’s Desk,” *Church News*, May 27, 1967, 6, where he again alludes to the rose prophecy in describing the reopening of missionary work in Torre Pellice: “Indeed, say reports, Italy seems to be blossoming like a rose in the very city where missionary work was started so long ago.”

congregations of members and beautiful chapels in which to worship and learn of God.”<sup>141</sup> While large congregations and beautiful chapels did become a reality over time in the Italian Mission, the trajectory of Church growth did not follow that of the South American missions (or later, the missions in Spain and Portugal). Mission literature and interviews show that, as familiarity with the Italian religious context increased, missionaries and members avoided spectacular predictions and more guardedly suggest growth that started “almost imperceptibly” and development that is “slow but sure.”

In addition to the constraints noted in the press reaction to the growing LDS presence in Italy, other factors both within the fledgling mission structure and in Italian society hampered efforts to reintroduce Mormonism in Italy. Mission records indicate that retaining members after their baptism surfaced as a major challenge early in the new mission. Disaffection occurred for a variety of reasons that led to gradual waning of commitment, decreased participation, and, in some cases, open apostasy. When missionaries were transferred to another city, converts often felt abandoned, especially if they had been more attached to the missionary than to the message, and unless other congregants and the new missionaries could connect with them.

Family and societal pressures also exerted a powerful influence in determining whether a convert could forge a new religious identity and maintain consistent affiliation in the Church. President Christensen felt that, in a country whose population was 95 percent Catholic, the parish priest had a powerful influence on a convert’s commitment: “It is economically difficult to get along in Italy if you are not of that faith. Italy is a country of small businesses. Their success depends on the support of other local families and especially the local Priests who come around to pronounce blessings upon the business enterprises of the faithful. . . . Many believe our doctrines but have not the courage to face the results of baptism. On the other hand there are many who believe and who have the courage of their convictions.” He added that the Vatican “never indicated, while we were there, that we even existed in Italy. The local Priests in the Parishes,

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<sup>141</sup>Thomas S. Monson, Minutes of the member conference held at Piazza Vescovio 3/3, Rome, on November 5, 1968, Italy Rome Mission, General Minutes, 1968–, LR 4142–11, LDS Church History Library.

however, were very actively combating what we did.”<sup>142</sup>

After baptism, families of converts to Mormonism continued to pressure them to reconsider, and conflicts arose when meetings were scheduled at the same time as family activities, especially during the week. Family and peers often criticized converts for reduced participation in Italian social life—especially no longer observing Catholic religious rituals and declining such small but significant cultural gestures as accepting a glass of wine, a cup of coffee, or a cigarette from a friend. In some instances, neighbors shunned them, storekeepers gave them a hard time, and employers refused to hire them because of their perceived religious deviancy. Duns commented that members often asked him to write letters of reference for employment in cases where the local parish priest, who traditionally performed this role, refused to help a former parishioner.<sup>143</sup> For these reasons, it became common for missionaries to spend considerable time fellowshipping and reactivating members in addition to recruiting new converts.

As noted earlier, the LDS Church’s reliance on personal development through lay leadership proved attractive to Italians, accustomed as they were to a more passive role in religious life. But finding converts, particularly men, who could make the transition from committed observer to deeply involved leader also posed problems in the early phase of Church development. While many Italian converts adjusted quickly to leadership roles and exhibited commitment and acumen in taking the reins of a branch or auxiliary organization, in some cases tension and instability emerged when novice Church leaders imported cultural and personal habits into the Church setting, exhibiting a style of leadership characterized by authoritarianism and cult of personality.

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<sup>142</sup>Leavitt Christensen, “Italian Mission Presidency,” #8: Files, clippings, and other memorabilia relating to his mission experience, 1969–93, Christensen Papers. Scholars have also noted the divergence of interests between the Vatican and the local Catholic churches in Italy: “The Vatican is not identical with the Catholic Church. . . . The growing difference between the concerns of the Vatican and the concerns of the Italian Catholic hierarchy is one of the major developments in this area in recent years.” Paul Furlong, “The Changing Role of the Vatican in Italian Politics,” in Luisa Quartermaine and John Pollard, eds., *Italy Today: Patterns of Life and Politics* (Exeter, England: University of Exeter Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>143</sup>Duns, Oral History, 29, 50–51.

Within the first three years of the mission's founding, several Italian leaders were excommunicated for apostasy related to egregious misconduct in their leadership position. Records show that elders from the mission office were occasionally dispatched to cities around the mission to meet with a Church leader who deliberately ignored Church teachings and procedures and defied the admonitions of the mission president. In the most serious cases, a branch president or prominent member disagreed with a Church doctrine or policy and rallied a coterie of members to support him against the central Church leadership. Sometimes false doctrines and practices crept in, necessitating action from mission leaders. In other cases, branch presidents and a good share of the branch membership had to be released from their callings and disciplined because they formed organizations and initiated practices that went far beyond Church guidelines.

President Christensen cited numerous examples of these problems. One branch president, formerly a Communist, was released from his position and later excommunicated because he openly and insistently advocated that Church leaders in Salt Lake City should still be teaching members to live under the United Order, the communal social and economic system practiced by Mormons at times during the nineteenth century. In another instance, members in one branch organized a "Good Death Society" to prepare to die well, holding secret meetings under the direction of the local church leaders. Christensen had to disband the meetings and release leaders from their Church callings.<sup>144</sup> In an article to all Church members in Italy, published in *La Stella* in June 1971, Christensen dwelt at length on the problem of false doctrines and practices that must be eliminated. He reviewed what revelation is, to whom it is given, and under what circumstances it is received. Apparently, some converts had approached him and other mission leaders with their own revelations about how the Church should be run and what its doctrine should be. He cited examples in newer branches where members and investigators claimed to have had visions and been possessed by multiple spirits. He warned the members to stay away from "idle amusements" such as magicians, soothsayers, and others who experiment with the powers of the Adversary and cautioned against associating with individuals who feel the need to create tales in order to

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<sup>144</sup>Christensen, Interview.

get attention. These problems, Christensen concluded, are especially harmful in small branches with many new members, and therefore members should always be grateful but discreet in sharing with others God's personal revelations.<sup>145</sup>

Another persistent challenge was that investigators and converts frequently asked missionaries for assistance to emigrate to the United States despite the clear Church policy that members should remain in their own countries. While Italians during the 1960s may have had an aversion for the Vietnam War and other aspects of U.S. foreign policy, they were also generally enamored of American life and culture. There was already a long tradition of U.S. aid to Italy and Italian emigration to the U.S. that forged strong economic, social, and political ties between the two countries.<sup>146</sup> The Church's image as an American religion with American leaders and missionaries compounded the problem of converts seeking to emigrate. In his oral history, Duns stated that "we did everything we could to stop that from happening" to help the Church grow in Italy. He and other mission leaders reminded the members that everything needed to enjoy the blessings of the restored gospel is "right here for you with your own people."<sup>147</sup>

In spite of the Church's policy and the efforts of mission leaders to keep members in Italy, over the years a sizeable number of converts emigrated and settled in the United States, especially Utah. They often attended Church-sponsored schools or married LDS spouses—in many cases, returned missionaries who served in Italy. It is also true that many converts who were attracted to the Mormon Church hoping for better economic opportunities or finding an American spouse discontinued their participation in the LDS com-

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<sup>145</sup>Leavitt Christensen, "Editoriale del Presidente della Missione," *La Stella* 4, no. 6 (June 1971): 189–90.

<sup>146</sup>Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 252, observes that in post-war Italy the "seductive message of private consumption" was more appealing than the message of socialism. "The dreams of most ordinary Italians . . . were made in Hollywood, not Moscow." American aid was "a key element in the post-war recovery. From 1943 to 1948 Italy received over 2 billion dollars' worth of assistance from the United States, with a further 1.5 billion under the Marshall Plan over the next four years."

<sup>147</sup>Duns, Oral History, 75–76.



*Left: Apostle Thomas S. Monson, Frances Monson, Rula Christensen, and Leavitt Christensen, president of the Italian Mission. Elder Monson supervised missionary work in Italy beginning in 1968, visiting the country numerous times. Photo courtesy of LDS Church History Library.*

munity when those hopes went unfulfilled.

### THE END OF “CHAPTER ONE”

By 1970, due to growth in the number of missionaries and converts, and with pressing leadership and logistical issues to address, the mission had become more than one president could handle. Another factor that strained mission resources was the sheer geographic and demographic size of the country: a long-distance drive of about 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) from the north border to the south border, and a population of approximately 56 million people.

Christensen made this point with Thomas S. Monson, his supervisor in the Quorum of the Twelve: “I produced a map of Europe and placed a compass point on the North border of Italy and stretched it out so that the pencil point was at the South end of Italy. We then drew a circle with Italy as the radius. On the far end of the circle the pencil passed through the center of England and then through the Scandina-

vian countries. Elder Monson said, "That is too big." Monson did not have the authority to unilaterally divide the mission, but he asked Christensen to start looking for a new mission home in Rome. "It was obvious that with two missions one would be in the North and one in the South," explained Christensen. "The major airports were at Milan and Rome. This factor would facilitate the arrival and departure of missionaries."<sup>148</sup>

In a letter to their family in January 1970, Leavitt and Rula Christensen sounded upbeat about the progress of the mission, the commitment of members and missionaries, and the prospects for future growth:

There is a spirit of expectancy here and everyone, members and missionaries, seem to feel the spirit of the Lord working on the people of Italy. We are getting in places and receiving successes that a year ago were not dreamed of. We have had nationwide television coverage which was very favorable and the publicity received from that has had a terrific impact on our ability to get into places. . . . We have a great mission, and the spirit is very high. Everyone is hot for baptisms and there is very little goofing off any more. But it has taken a lot of work and confidence building.<sup>149</sup>

Beginning in spring 1970, Leavitt and Rula Christensen looked diligently for a building in Rome that would serve as both a mission home and offices. Even by summer, they had found nothing suitable: sites were too close to the airport, or under the flight pattern, or on a busy street, or inadequate in size and shape. When it became too burdensome to be living in Florence and looking for real estate in Rome, they assigned the task to the zone leaders in Rome. The ZLs found a villa that the Christensens visited and liked. Monson came as soon as he could and gave the stamp of approval:

He walked in the door, viewed the lower floor rooms, ascended the marble stairway to the bedroom area and on up to the third floor. When he returned he said, "This is the building the Lord wants us to have as a mission home." . . . The sellers wanted the building preserved

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<sup>148</sup>Christensen, "Italian Mission Presidency," #8-Files, clippings, and other memorabilia, Christensen Papers.

<sup>149</sup>Christensen, Letter to family, January 23, 1970, "Italian Mission Presidency," #8-Files, clippings, and other memorabilia, Christensen Papers.



*Zone leaders, following a conference at the newly purchased mission home in Rome, loading publications in their cars and receiving last-minute instructions from President and Sister Christensen. Photo courtesy of LDS Church History Library.*

and were willing to sell to us at a lower price in order to do so. When we first went to see the owner and seller he produced a copy of the *Improvement Era* in which was shown pictures of the rooms in one of the LDS temples. He said that he had faith that his home would be in good hands with such an organization.<sup>150</sup>

The headquarters of the Italy Mission were moved from Florence to the new villa at Via Cimone 95 in Rome's Monte Sacro neighborhood on September 7–9, 1970. At first, the Church rented the villa; but on October 15, 1971, the purchase was confirmed with the owners, represented by Signora Maria Luisa Piergili Benagiano, and the money was wired from the LDS offices in Frankfurt. After the transfer was complete, the group “went to a nearby café to toast the

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid.



event with a glass of orange juice.”<sup>151</sup>

Christensen reported in March 1971 that, after six years of proselytizing in Italy, nineteen cities had active missionary teams in Italy with 1,452 members organized into twenty-five Italian branches and four servicemen’s groups.<sup>152</sup> Annual baptismal figures indicated an upward trend in Church growth: membership had nearly tripled since 1967, with 92 baptisms that year, 193 in 1968, 288 in 1969, and 365 in 1970.<sup>153</sup> Based on these figures, mission leaders projected 500 baptisms during 1971; and on April 24 of that year, amid the optimism generated by steady growth and positive publicity for the Church in the national media, came the much-anticipated announcement. The Italy Mission would be divided into Italy North and Italy South, beginning July 1, with Dan Charles Jorgensen as the president of Italy North and Christensen continuing as president of Italy South.<sup>154</sup>

Mission leaders referred to the division of the mission as an important milestone. At conferences held in Milan and Rome in May 1971, Apostle Thomas Monson challenged the missionaries to close out “Chapter One” of the “Great Italy Mission” in grand fashion by baptizing a hundred persons during May and June.<sup>155</sup> This nascent phase of LDS evangelism in Italy laid the foundation for a period of rapid expansion in the 1970s and early ’80s, followed by three de-

<sup>151</sup>Italian Mission Manuscript History, October, 15, 1971.

<sup>152</sup>Cited in “City of Venice Opened to Missionary Work,” *Church News*, March 20, 1971, 12.

<sup>153</sup>Peter Wilkins, mission historian, “The Great Italy Mission: End of an Era,” *The Trumpet* 6, no. 6 (June 1971): 6; copy in my possession. See also “2 Church Missions Will Now Serve Italy,” 5. The baptismal numbers reported in the *Church News* for 1968–70 are slightly lower than those cited in *The Trumpet*.

<sup>154</sup>“2 Church Missions Will Now Serve Italy,” 5; and J. M. Heslop, “Italy Is a Golden Opportunity for Missionaries,” *Church News*, June 12, 1971, 4–5. A few years earlier, in June 1970, the name of the mission was changed from the Italian Mission (commonly called the “Great Italian Mission” in mission literature and discourse) to the Italy Mission, the first of several steps taken by Church officials to standardize the nomenclature of LDS missions worldwide. In 1974 it became the Italy Rome Mission, in keeping with the renaming of all missions to include the headquarters city.

<sup>155</sup>Thomas S. Monson, cited in James A. Toronto, “The Finishing

acades of slower growth but increasing maturity and stability within the Church and greater acceptance and integration in Italian public life. By 2014, Italy had ten stakes, and the Italian government had granted the Church full legal recognition. A temple was in the final stages of construction in the capital city, Rome.

Issues surrounding the internationalization of the Mormon Church and the tensions and transitions inherent in crossing boundaries of faith, culture, language, and geography to forge a new religious identity have formed the focus of this essay. Specifically, I have sought to shed light on the evangelistic enterprise by which the Church attempted a second time, as one American journalist aptly put it, "to transport into the heartland of Roman Catholicism a faith that grew out of the American frontier."<sup>156</sup> My central argument, based on evidence from the Italian case, is that the transformation of Mormonism from a marginalized spiritual movement into a major religion of global presence has resulted from a complex interplay of historical timing, political imperatives, socioeconomic conditions, intrinsic spiritual appeal, institutional capacity for redefinition and renewal, and the religious proclivities of individuals. This volatile constellation of factors must be taken into account to understand, explain, and predict with some degree of accuracy the rise, expansion, and impact of the Mormon Church and of new religious movements in general.

If all politics is local, as the saying goes, it is also true that all religion is local. Drawing accurate conclusions about growth and vitality in any faith community, including the LDS Church, requires careful street-level observation more than the birds-eye view of Church almanacs and annual statistical reports. Progress, when observed at the level of individual Church units and members, is not a smooth continuum of unstinting growth, unflinching faith, or undeviating progress toward an idealized Zion. Rather, achieving "real growth" is a complex process marked by fits and starts, advances and retreats, times of feast and famine, periods of expansion but also of stagnation and con-

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Kick," *The Trumpetino*, 6, no. 5 (May 29, 1971): 2-3; copy in my possession; Wilkins, "End of an Era," 15.

<sup>156</sup>Edward B. Fiske, New York Times Service, "Mormon Missionaries Converting Catholics in Italy," *Arizona Republic*, December 4, 1971, photocopy of article in Christensen, #8-Files, clippings, and other memorabilia relating to his mission experience, 1969-93, Christensen Papers.

traction, even extinction. As one Mormon historian observed, “Rapid growth creates paradoxical sentiments: hope and despair, motivation and frustration, love and distrust. Dichotomies are part of the challenges Mormons face” as they move forward with “the internationalization of the Church and universalizing of the message of Mormonism”—from being a church “of limited local appeal to one of worldwide impact.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1987): xiv–xv.

# WILLIAM B. SMITH AND THE “JOSEPHITES”

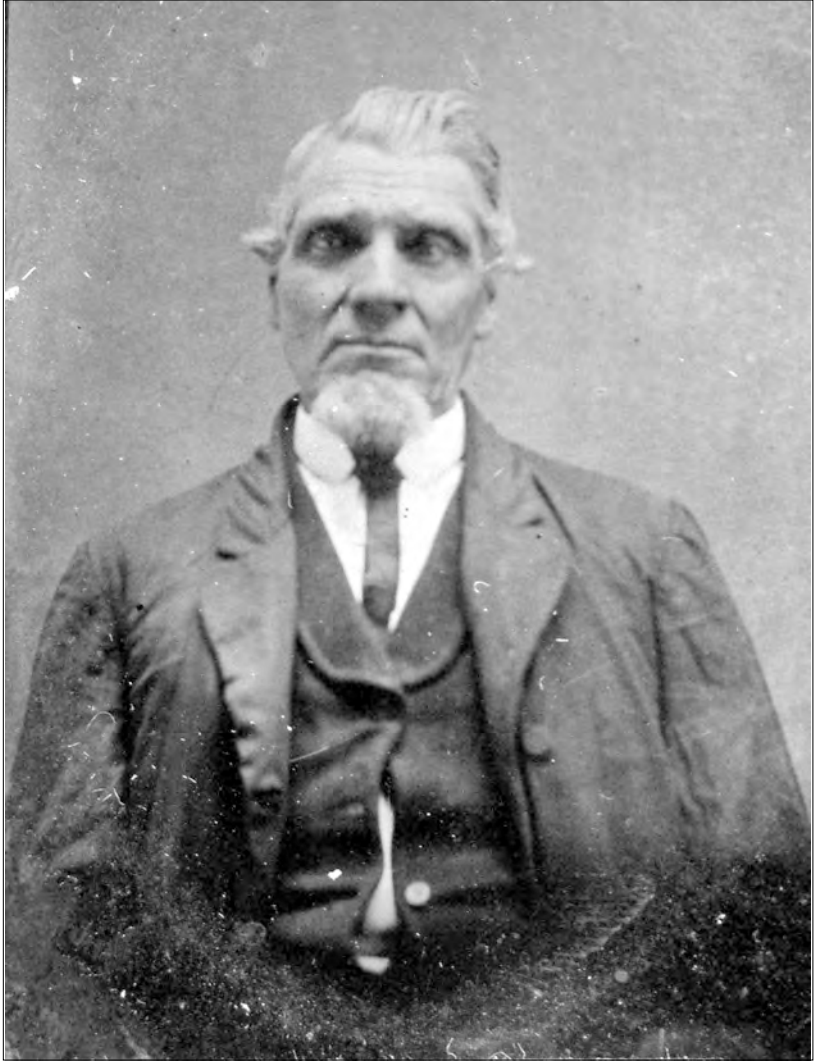
*Kyle R. Walker*

THE DEATHS OF JOSEPH AND HYRUM SMITH in June 1844, followed within a month by the death from an undiagnosed illness of a third brother, Samuel H. Smith, left thirty-three-year-old Apostle William B. Smith as the only surviving son of Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith. He was serving a mission in the East and stayed there, following the advice of those who feared that his life might be in danger if he rushed back to Nauvoo with the other apostles who were scattered throughout the East on similar missions to promote Joseph Smith’s candidacy for the U.S. presidency. Thus, William was not in Nauvoo during Sidney Rigdon’s attempt to position himself as the Church’s “guardian” based on his position in Joseph Smith’s First Presidency, nor was he present as Brigham Young, president of the Quorum of the Twelve, arrived at the last minute and thwarted Rigdon’s attempt.

But significantly, William positioned himself solidly with the

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*William B. Smith, ca. 1860. This is William's earliest known photograph. Photograph courtesy of Mary Dennis, photograph of original by Kyle R. Walker.*

Twelve. In a letter to Brigham Young on August 24, 1844, William affirmed his belief that with Joseph’s death “the 12 come next . . . as presiding officers & govern the Church in all things temporaly & Spiritually recieving revalation from Joseph as the ancient Apostles did from Christ through the president of the Corum [Quorum] for the instruction & government of the Church. This will constitute a proper head & keep confusion & disorder out the Church. the President bein[g] supported by the prayr & united faith of the rest of the 12. . . . This duty than involves [devolves] upon you Brother Young as head & revelator to receive revelations from Joseph for the government of the Church.”<sup>1</sup>

However, William was not only an apostle but, given Hyrum’s death, would soon be appointed Church patriarch, a hereditary position to which Hyrum had been ordained upon Joseph Sr.’s death. (Hyrum was also assistant Church president, a little-understood office that would create confusion later as William and Brigham tangled over jurisdictional issues.) In the same letter to Young, William asked that leaders at Nauvoo “remember me & my clames in the Smith family,”—a reference to his desire that he be formally appointed as the presiding patriarch. William acknowledged in his letter to Young that the office of Church patriarch was to be governed by the Twelve, and he carefully explained his understanding of the calling. The patriarch was a “father to the whole Church.” He continued: “A Patriarch can be a prophet & revelator, not to the Church as government but to the church as his children in Patriarchal blessings upon their heads in prophcing teaching & fartherly care &c.”<sup>2</sup> Young wrote to Smith the following month, indicating that he was “happy to inform you that your mind is precisely the same as my brethren the Twelve,” and that “the right [of the Patriarchal office] rests upon your head.”<sup>3</sup>

In short, the immediate follow-up of Joseph and Hyrum’s murders as united with and a staunch supporter of the Quorum of the

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<sup>1</sup>William Smith, (Bordentown, N.J.) Letter to Brigham Young, August 24, 1844, LDS Church History Library. In quotations from holograph documents, I have added terminal punctuation and initial capitals for clarification.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Brigham Young (Nauvoo, Ill.), Letter to Beloved Br. William [Smith], September 28, 1844, LDS Church History Library.

Twelve Apostles, of which he was a member. But within a matter of months, this unity frayed, intensifying to the point of an open breach within a year. William, who turned thirty-three three months before his brothers' deaths, spent the next decade at a whirlwind pace, affiliating with virtually every expression of Mormonism and even establishing his own unsuccessful church until, disillusioned and exhausted, he spent two decades from the late 1850s until the late 1870s unaffiliated with any denomination. In 1878, he constructed a cautious *détente* with his nephew, Joseph III, that gave him a limited but secure and honorable place within the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. This article traces William's energetic, frequently effective, but ultimately self-destructive trajectory through the fragments of a Mormonism that was trying to find itself during the decade following 1845 when he broke spectacularly with Brigham Young's Twelve, his attempt to found his own church, and a long hiatus of nonaffiliation with any religion until 1878 when he was received upon his original baptism and ordination into his nephew's church.

The first signs of trouble emerged with startling promptness after this exchange of cordialities between William and Brigham. Following these letters of support, members of the Twelve at Nauvoo became increasingly concerned about William's leadership in the East. Brigham Young learned from Apostle Wilford Woodruff, who traveled through the eastern branches during the months of October-December 1844, that William had authorized plural marriages, bestowed the sealing power on several of his colleagues, and had diverted the eastern Saints' temple donations to his own ends.<sup>4</sup> Young acted almost immediately after receiving Woodruff's report, sending Parley P. Pratt to assume leadership over the eastern branches in December 1844.<sup>5</sup> Pratt's appointment sent William into a simmering rage, but a letter written to William from Heber C. Kimball temporarily pacified him. Kimball assured William that leaders at Nauvoo were expecting

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<sup>4</sup> Wilford Woodruff (Boston, Mass.), Letter to Brigham Young, October 9, 1844; Wilford Woodruff (Boston, Mass.), Letter to Brigham Young, October 14, 1844; Wilford Woodruff (Philadelphia, Pa.), Letter to Brigham Young, December 3, 1844; all in Brigham Young Office Files, Box 43, fd. 24, 1844, Church History Library; John S. Dinger, ed., *The Nauvoo High City and High Council Minutes* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011), 548–50, 549 note 17–18.

<sup>5</sup> Church leaders at Nauvoo published an editorial that read, "Elder

him to return to Nauvoo immediately—one reason that had factored into their appointment of Pratt—and that until he left for Nauvoo, the two apostles should “act as one.”<sup>6</sup> But the experience made William uneasy about his ecclesiastical station.

In April 1845, William was still in the East, but his wife, Caroline, who had suffered ill health for several years, was now dying of what appeared to be kidney failure. William was anxious to bring her back to Nauvoo to be closer to her own family (the Grants), and his mother and sisters. When William and the ailing Caroline arrived in Nauvoo on May 4, 1845, they landed in a city in turmoil. Caroline died on May 22;<sup>7</sup> and not quite a week later on May 30, the men who had been charged as implicated in the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith were declared not guilty by a jury of their peers. The Saints were racing against time to complete the temple so they could receive their endowments before mounting pressure forced them out of their beautiful city. The succession question would continue to bring other claimants into the open, including the charismatic James J. Strang.

Emma Smith’s growing mistrust of Brigham Young and their clash over whether certain pieces of property belonged to Joseph personally or to the Church encouraged some to look toward twelve-year-old Joseph III as a potential future successor. Emma had no desire to see a child of hers swept into the kind of conflict that had taken Joseph’s life, but others began to lobby for his appointment. One of them was thirty-four-year-old George J. Adams, a member of Joseph’s

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Parley P. Pratt has been appointed by the council of the Twelve to go to the city of New York, to take charge of the press in that city . . . and to take the presidency of all the eastern churches.” “Elder Parley P. Pratt . . .,” *Times and Seasons* 5, no. 22 (December 1, 1844): 727.

<sup>6</sup>Heber C. Kimball (Nauvoo, Ill.), Letter to William Smith, January 9, 1845, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>7</sup>Caroline Grant, born on January 2, 1814, at Windsor, Broome County, New York, was the younger sister of future LDS First Presidency member, Jedediah M. Grant. Nauvoo cemetery records indicate that Caroline died from “dropsey of the abdomen,” on May 22, 1845. William Smith (Nauvoo), Letter to Joshua Grant, August 12, 1845, in *Nauvoo Neighbor* 3, no. 16 (August 20, 1845): 3; Fred E. Woods, “The Cemetery Record of William D. Huntington, Nauvoo Sexton,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 152; Lyndon W. Cook, comp., *Nauvoo Deaths and Marriages, 1839–1845* (Provo, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 70.



political Council of Fifty, who had been severed from the main body of the Church just two months before William's return to Nauvoo. He had been charged with misusing Church funds and participating in unauthorized polygamy.<sup>8</sup> Adams had been a close confidant of William's during his eastern mission. On May 23, 1845, William Clayton anxiously recorded in his journal that "W[illiam] Smith is coming out in opposition to the Twelve and in favor of [George J.] Adams. The latter has organized a church at Augusta, Iowa Territory with young Joseph Smith for President, Wm Smith for Patriarch."<sup>9</sup>

A tumultuous summer followed. William remarried with almost indecent haste only a month after Caroline's death but was also ordained to the office of Presiding Patriarch on May 24 and, commendably, devoted himself to giving members their patriarchal blessings.<sup>10</sup> However, William tactlessly challenged the Twelve's authority and spent the summer sparring with them over the scope of his own authority including—intriguingly enough—vacillating in his definition of lineal succession between promoting his own right to preside over the Church and the right of his nephew, young Joseph.<sup>11</sup> He fled from the city in mid-September and published an inflammatory tract denouncing the Twelve. As a result, the October 1845 general conference refused to sustain him as either apostle or patriarch, and he was

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<sup>8</sup>Peter Amann, "Prophet in Zion: The Saga of George J. Adams," *New England Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (December, 1964): 479–80; Dinger, *The Nauvoo City and High Council Minutes*, 547–50; "Notice to the Churches Around," *Times and Seasons* 7, no. 115 (April 15, 1845): 878.

<sup>9</sup>George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 166.

<sup>10</sup>For an analysis of the scope, promises, and political subtexts of these blessings, see Christine Elyse Blythe, "William Smith's Patriarchal Blessings and Contested Authority in the Post-Martyrdom Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 60–95.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 169. For a summary of William's activities that summer, see Kyle R. Walker, "William Smith's Quest for Ecclesiastical Station: A Schismatic Odyssey, 1844–93," in *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism*, edited by Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer (Independence: John Whitmer Books, 2007), 92–100; and Kyle R. Walker, "Looking after the First Family of Mormonism: LDS Church Leaders' Support of the Smiths after the Murders of Joseph and Hyrum," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 32, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2012): 17–27.

excommunicated before the month's end.<sup>12</sup>

How had William's views on succession shifted so dramatically in the course of one year? The answer lay in his perception that he was steadily being distanced from his apostolic office and that the role of presiding patriarch lacked governing authority—and was, in any case, supervised by the Twelve, a relationship that he resented. These perceptions prevented him from seeing how his own misconduct had led the Twelve to restrict his influence after he returned to Nauvoo. William felt he was the victim of a conspiracy hatched by the Twelve to curtail his influence in the Church and to appropriate Joseph Smith's accumulated wealth to their own emolument.

His fragile self-image and inability to acknowledge his mistakes prevented him from considering an alternative view. He became an opportunist, desperately searching for an exalted station among any faction of Mormonism that would support his own self-importance. These characteristics, combined with his personal ambition, led him to take the course of promoting what he perceived as the rights of the Smith family. His subsequent history reveals that William had been imbued with a sense of specialness about being a Smith. After he perceived the diminishing of his own role in the Church, he began to believe that he or his nephew should lead the Church, an ambition that Emma Smith did not welcome or encourage. The first document to support this concept is in a letter to his friend Jesse C. Little, while Smith was still at Nauvoo in August 1845: “Emma is well and also little Joseph his fathers successor although some people would fain make us believe that the Twelve are to be the perpetual heads of this church to the exclusion of the Smith family, but every one who has read the book of Doctrine and Covenants must be aware that Priesthood authority is hereditary and descends from Father to son and therefore Josephs oldest son will take his place when he arrives at the age of maturity.”<sup>13</sup>

His first stop was Iowa, where he briefly affiliated with Adams, who promised him the office of patriarch. The duo preached at St. Louis in the fall of 1845, then in Cincinnati in early 1846. At St. Louis, William began publicly promoting his thirteen-year-old nephew's fu-

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<sup>12</sup> William Smith, “A Proclamation,” *Warsaw Signal* 2, no. 32 (October 29, 1845): 1, 4.

<sup>13</sup> William Smith (Nauvoo), Letter to Jesse C. Little, August 20, 1845, typescript by Ireta Anderson, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

ture leadership while attempting to gather adherents. James Kay, a Mormon loyal to the Twelve in St. Louis, reported that William “contends the church is disorganized, having no head, that the twelve are not, nor ever were, ordained to be head of the church, that Joseph’s priesthood was to be conferred on his posterity to all future generations, and that young Joseph [III] is the only legal successor to the presidency of this church.”<sup>14</sup> Smith had large dreams but few resources. While he had some influence on Mormons in St. Louis and Cincinnati, few supported his claims. Additionally, he and Adams failed to agree on the core tenets of their organization, though they were unified in their opposition to the Twelve’s leadership.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence that William was indeed pumping up his own authority by using the Smith name came when William linked his ambition to James J. Strang during 1846-47. He temporarily shelved the idea of a Smith’s right to the presidency as long as Strang elevated William within his movement. While preaching at Cincinnati, William was proselyted by Strangite missionary Samuel Searls, and both Smith and Adams shortly afterwards announced their adherence to Strang.<sup>16</sup> In March 1846, just weeks after Brigham Young led the vanguard company of Saints out of Nauvoo, William returned to the city. There he met former Apostle John E. Page, also a Strang advocate, and began corresponding with the emerging leader.<sup>17</sup>

William expressed his support of Strang’s leadership frequently from March 1846 through the spring of 1847 but, in reality, spent only

<sup>14</sup>James Kay (St. Louis, Missouri), Letter to Brother Ward, November 22, 1845, *Millennial Star* 7, no. 9 (May 1, 1846): 134-35.

<sup>15</sup>George D. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 166; James Kay to Brother [first name not given] Ward (St. Louis, Mo.), November 22, 1845, *Millennial Star* 7, no. 9 (May 1, 1846): 134-35; “Mormonism—The Young Joseph!,” *Weekly Reveille* (St. Louis) 2, no. 17 (November 3, 1845): 1; “Mormon Oratory,” *True American* (Lexington, Ky.) 1, no. 19 (November 25, 1845): 1.

<sup>16</sup>“Ho! for Voree,” *Voree Herald* 1, no. 3 (March 1846): 2; W[illia]m. Smith (Nauvoo) Letter to Brother Strang, March 11, 1846, in *Voree Herald* 1, no. 4 (April 1846): 7; George J. Adams (Lewisburgh, Ohio), Letter to the Saints Scattered Abroad in All the World, July 6, 1846, in *Voree Herald* 1, no. 7 (July 1846): 3-4.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Bullock recorded in his journal that on March 8, 1846, “William Smith landed in Nauvoo with a parcel of drunken rowdies who commenced firing guns in the air and creating a disturbance and alarm.”

a few weeks total at Strang’s headquarters in Voree, Wisconsin. However, his correspondence revealed his ambition: that Strang acknowledge that he had been wronged by the Twelve, ordain him to his own Council of the Twelve Apostles, and sustain him as the “Presiding Patriarch over the Church.” In one letter, William urged Strang to formally declare him the presiding patriarch, an office that also entitled him to be a member of the First Presidency—much like the position his brother Hyrum had held before his death. William wrote:

I go in for honors now days as well as rights[.] If [I am] a councilor . . . [in] the Presadency why not say so[?] If [I am] one of the three presidents why not say so[?] or if [I am] a Presadent protem in the place of litle Joseph [III] etc . . . why [not] name it. I know of no nameless offices in the Church. If any think me Signfant [insignificant] they will find themselves mistaken[.] The 12 apostels, Patriarch, (over or in) the Church have a seat in the councils of the first Presidency as well as this newly named ‘Cheaf Patriarch of the Church.’<sup>18</sup>

Strang was more than eager to have William’s support, especially since William promised to also deliver his mother, three sisters, and the Egyptian mummies to Voree.<sup>19</sup> Those plans never materialized, but Strang obligingly appointed William as an apostle, as “CHIEF PATRIARCH” presiding over “*the whole church*,” and as holding “a seat in the councils of the *first presidency*, as coadjutor,” thanks to the patriarchy.<sup>20</sup> But the relationship unraveled quickly when William was accused of “gross immorality” (likely polygamy) during his short stay at Voree in 1846. At the April 1847 Strangite conference at Voree, William’s reputation had deteriorated to such an extent that the Strangite congregation refused to sustain him as an apostle, though allowing him to continue in his office as patriarch. After failing to negotiate a compromise that would retain William’s loyalty,

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According to Bullock, William met with Page at the latter’s home on March 10. Greg R. Knight, ed., *Thomas Bullock Nauwoo Journal* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1994), 61–62.

<sup>18</sup>William Smith (Knoxville, Ill.), Letter to James Jesse Strang, December 25, 1846, Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

<sup>19</sup>William Smith (Knoxville, Ill.), Letter to James Jesse Strang, December 19, 1846, Beinecke Library; “Opinions of the Smith Family,” *Voree Herald* 1, no. 6 (June 1846): 1.

<sup>20</sup>“The First Presidency,” *Zion’s Reveille* 1, no. 12 (December 1846): 1.

and by extension that of the Smith family, Strang reluctantly broke ties with William and excommunicated him for “adultery” in October 1847.<sup>21</sup> George Adams lingered long enough to crown Strang king on July 8, 1850, using robes and a crown from a trunk of theatrical props, but his relationship with William had fizzled by this time.<sup>22</sup>

Four months earlier by June 1847, William had severed his own ties with Strang, had married his first wife’s younger sister Roxey Ann in May in Knox County, Illinois,<sup>23</sup> and immediately petitioned Apostle Orson Hyde, (then at Kaneshville, Iowa) for reinstatement into the LDS Church. When William found Hyde’s skeptical response unsatisfactory, he renewed his ambition of building his own church and also revived the idea of lineal succession.<sup>24</sup> In August 1847 he launched his own “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints” and, without the

<sup>21</sup>“The Minutes of the Annual Conference . . .,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2, no. 16 (July 8, 1847): 3; “It becomes our painful duty. . .,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2, no. 23 (August 26, 1847): 3; “Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” *Zion’s Reveille* 2, no. 30 (October 14, 1847): 2. While William stayed in Voree, he lived with Benjamin and Sarah Ellsworth, who also belonged to Strang’s church. Sarah later testified that William had shared a bed with Abenade Archer at their home on at least one occasion. Evidence that Benjamin may have polygamously married William and Abenade came when Benjamin was excommunicated from Strang’s church around the same time as William, for practicing “spiritual wifery.” John J. Hajicek, comp., *Chronicles of Voree, 1844–1849*, 151. Sarah was apparently unaware that her husband or William Smith were polygamists. Testimony of Sarah Ellsworth before James J. Strang, April 23, 1847, John C. Gaylord accuser vs. William Smith accused, Complaint for Adultery, Document 181, Strang Collection, Beinecke Library.

<sup>22</sup>Vickie Cleverley Speek, “*God Has Made Us a Kingdom*”: *James Strang and the Midwest Mormons* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2006), 120–22.

<sup>23</sup>William married Roxey Ann Grant on May 19, 1847, in Knox County, Illinois, where Roxey Ann’s parents resided. William Smith to Roxey Ann Grant, May 19, 1847, Knox County Marriage Records, 1:84, Knox County Courthouse, Galesburg, Illinois.

<sup>24</sup>William Smith (St. Louis), Letter to Orson Hyde, June 2, 1847, LDS Church History Library; William Smith (St. Louis), Letter to Orson Hyde, June 22, 1847, LDS Church History Library; William Smith, *William Smith, Patriarch & Prophet of the Most High God. Latter Days Saints Beware of Imposition!* (Ottawa, Ill., September 1847), copy at LDS Church History Library.

permission of Emma Hale Smith or Joseph III, began to vociferously promote his nephew's right to succeed his father as prophet and president. He established his headquarters in the heart of Lee County, Illinois, where a handful of disillusioned Mormons were farming at Palestine Grove (also known as Rocky Ford and later Shelburn). Exuberant over even this limited success, he modified the idea of lineal succession so that it focused on his own right to preside.

In the summer of 1848, he found marked success as a missionary, traveling to Cincinnati, Ohio, and across the river to Covington, Kentucky. Essential to the growth of his church was the conversion of Isaac Sheen, an 1840 convert who owned a printing press and was an experienced editor.<sup>25</sup> Persuasively recruited by William, Sheen immediately began publishing the *Melchisedek and Aaronic Herald*.<sup>26</sup> In 1848–49, William and his colleagues launched an ambitious missionary effort along the eastern seaboard, resulting in a smattering of converts, most notably at Philadelphia and Hartford, Connecticut, where he established small branches of his church,<sup>27</sup> enabling him to build up his church at Covington/Cincinnati and Palestine Grove. He also made overtures to former Apostle Lyman Wight, who had taken his followers to Zodiac, Texas. Smith promoted the idea of lineal succession in his letters to Wight, and Wight distantly supported his former colleague's movement, sending representatives from his colony to one of Smith's church conferences.<sup>28</sup> William's success peaked in the winter of 1849 and the spring of 1850; but his overt ambition and covert introduction of polygamy undermined his success. Sheen, who

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<sup>25</sup>John Kirk Sheen, "Isaac Sheen First Editor of the 'Herald,'" *Saints' Herald* 57, no. 4 (January 26, 1910): 94–95.

<sup>26</sup>"A Trio," *Gospel Herald* (Voree, Wisconsin) 2, no. 39 (December 16, 1847): 184.

<sup>27</sup>Walter Wayne Smith, "Philadelphia Branch," *Journal of History* (Lamoni, Iowa) 13, no. 4 (October 1920), 521–24; "Progress Additional," *Melchisedek & Aaronic Herald* (Covington, Ky.) 1, no. 3 (May 1, 1849): 2.

<sup>28</sup>Lyman Wight (Zodiac Mills, Tex.), Letter to Brother William Smith, August 22, 1848, *Melchisedek and Aaronic Herald* 1, no. 2 (March 1849): 1; William Smith (Ellington, Conn.), Letter to Dear brother Lyman Wight, April 21, 1849, *Melchisedek and Aaronic Herald* 1, no. 4 (June 1849): 1; Melvin C. Johnson, *Polygamy on the Pedernales: Lyman Wight's Mormon Villages in Antebellum Texas, 1845–1858* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006), 29–57.

had been growing suspicious, succeeded in getting a letter from William that disclosed his support of the practice in May 1850. Sheen immediately and publicly renounced his association with William and drew nearly all of William's followers at Covington away. Sheen also informed William's wife, Roxey Ann, about William's support of polygamy. She was five months pregnant with their son, H. Wallace, but immediately left him, taking their two-year-old daughter, Thalia, and filed for divorce.<sup>29</sup> The legal battle was fairly lengthy, but the divorce became final in 1853. She received custody of both children.

William retreated to Palestine Grove and, during 1850–51, Smith proselytized and preached extensively through northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. He primarily targeted clusters of Saints who had formerly affiliated with Strang's organization but who had left him when they discovered that he advocated polygamy. Many had been searching for something to strengthen and regenerate their faith, and they found it in William Smith's theology of lineal succession. Among them was twenty-three-year-old William Wallace ("W. W.") Blair, born in Holly, New York, in 1828, and whose family had been among the earliest settlers in Lee County. Although still relatively young, Blair "loved truth and admired consistency in doctrine." William certainly knew Blair as a near neighbor during his comings and goings at Palestine Grove, but it was not until 1851 that the two men formed a closer relationship. Blair, who had joined the Church before Joseph Smith's death, had become "quite skeptical on religious questions" following the succession crisis. "Unsatisfied with what he heard," according to one colleague, "[and] disappointed in what he saw, he lost faith in professing Christians, and in Christian professors. But when he heard 'the eleventh hour message' delivered by William Smith, a brother of the Palmyra seer, he accepted it in good faith, and adhered to it thenceforth to the end. It was to him the Good Shepherd's voice."<sup>30</sup>

Blair left his own account of his conversion to William Smith's movement: "Residing near Amboy, Lee County, Illinois, I became in-

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<sup>29</sup>John K. Sheen, *Polygamy: Or, The Veil Lifted* (York, Neb.: n.pub., 1889), 14; "Wm. Smith—Fornication—Adultery," *Daily Cincinnati Commercial* 12 (May 22, 1850): 4; Isaac Sheen, "Wm. Smith—The Imposter," *Daily Nonpareil* (Cincinnati, Ohio) 3, no. 185 (May 20, 1850): 2.

<sup>30</sup>Mark H. Forscutt, "Statement of Obituary," in Frederick B. Blair, comp., *The Memoirs of President W. W. Blair* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publish-

terested in the doctrine of Christ taught by a body of Latter Day Saints, less than twenty in number, located in that vicinity, and on the eighth day of October, [1851,] after thorough conviction of the truth of that doctrine, I was baptized by Elder William B. Smith, brother of Joseph the Seer, and confirmed by him and others; and after four days, in answer to silent, fervent prayer, was as literally baptized with the Holy Spirit as I had previously been of water.” His wife and mother also united with Smith’s organization. “For weeks and months afterward,” Blair continued, “my highest anticipations in respect to the peace and love and spiritual blessings of the gospel were more than realized.”<sup>31</sup>

William also found a warm reception at Waukesha and Beloit, Wisconsin, and converted a number of Saints to his organization, including the prominent Briggs family at Beloit. Jason W. Briggs, just two years younger than Blair at age twenty-five, had joined the Mormons in 1841, and united with William’s church in the winter of 1850. William subsequently ordained the energetic Briggs as presiding elder over the Beloit Branch. Briggs quickly moved up the hierarchy in Smith’s Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. A few months later, William called Briggs as an apostle. Briggs recollected that, during the next year, seven or eight branches were established in Wisconsin, the largest of them at Beloit and Waukesha. He estimated that, at its peak, those who affiliated with Smith’s church in Wisconsin numbered several hundred.<sup>32</sup>

In a history published in 1875, Briggs reconstructed the reasons that Smith’s teachings resonated with so many Saints in this area:

William Smith; who, in the spring of 1850, called a Conference, at Covington, Kentucky; from which time he visited many of the branches and scattered Saints, teaching “lineal Priesthood” as applying to the Presidency of the Church; and thus disposing of all pretenders already arisen, or to rise out of the posterity of the original President of the Church. This principle, though pretty clearly shown in the books, had

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ing House, 1908), 202–3.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>32</sup>Pearl Wilcox, *Regathering of the Scattered Saints in Wisconsin and Illinois* (Independence, Mo.: Pearl G. Wilcox, 1984), 29–31; Jason W. Briggs (Beloit, Wisc.), Letter to Joseph Smith III, November 20, 1853; photocopy of holograph at LDS Church History Library.



been almost entirely overlooked, or forgotten by the Saints; but when their attention was thus called to it, many at once received it as the solution of the question of "Presidency." Wm. Smith taught also, in connection with this [teaching], that it was his right, as the only surviving brother of the former President, and uncle (and natural guardian) of the seed of Joseph, to stand, during the *interim*, as President, *pro tem*. And in this there seemed a general acquiescence on the part of the Saints among whom he labored; and he was so acknowledged, and began to organize. . . . Many branches, and nearly all the Saints in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin were identified with this movement, and among them was enjoyed a large measure of spiritual gifts.<sup>33</sup>

Smith's organization thus prospered in the area until the fall of 1851; but fatally, he had not learned that his members would, like those in Covington, react with repugnance about his belief in polygamy. Even though Sheen's earlier denunciation had apparently not reached the members in Illinois, William failed to capitalize on this advantage. Even more dangerously, he began secretly introducing polygamy to some of his most trusted leaders at Palestine Grove. In 1851, he published a pamphlet, *Epistle of the Twelve*, in 1851 at Milwaukee. Joseph Wood, an attorney and recent convert who was appointed William's "spokesmen," had been instrumental in its publication as an exposition of theological claims. Possibly its most inflammatory teaching was the conspicuous silence about Joseph III. William no longer claimed to be holding the president's office in guardianship for Joseph Smith's son—the teaching that had resonated strongly with the local Mormons and given them a focus for their reaffiliation with this branch of Mormonism. In fact, the pamphlet did not mention him at all. This was a marked change from his 1847–50 rhetoric about holding the office *pro tem* for his young nephew. Even though he had gradually begun making bolder claims for his own rights as Church president, in this pamphlet, Wood, obviously representing William's position, argued that "our brother William Smith [as] the only surviving son of the good old Patriarch, and of course the only surviving brother of Hyrum and Joseph Smith, [is] consequently the *only* living

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<sup>33</sup>Jason W. Briggs, "History of the Reorganization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Chapter 1," *The Messenger* (Salt Lake City) 2, no. 1 (November 1875): 1. This RLDS newspaper was published in 1874–76 in Salt Lake City, vigorously tackling the controversial topics of polygamy, lineal succession, and other doctrine issues.

heir to the Patriarchy and the First Presidency over the church.” He reiterated the same concept four different times in the publication.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of this publication and William’s bolder claims, some of his followers, especially some key leaders, felt uneasy about William’s ambition, and matters came to a head at a general conference of October 6, 1851, in Palestine Grove. Jason Briggs had apparently already expressed his discomfort about William’s changed view of his role, and Woods responded on September 30, only days before the conference. In an attempt to deflect Briggs’s concerns, he quoted a revelation pronounced by William Smith that rebuked Briggs:

And, now, Behold, I say concerning my servant, Jason W. Briggs, hast thou not murmured in thine heart against me? Now this is the thing that I have against thee, thou hast not trusted to my word, nor given heed to the counsel of my Spirit; nor was it justifiable in thee, to give way to a fearful Spirit while listening to the bickerings of enemies; and also to the lying slanders of secret conspirators against my servants, William Smith and Joseph Wood. It was for this cause that darkness came over thy mind; and a cloud, and condemnation resteth upon thee until thy heart shall be entirely cleansed from sin and unbelief.<sup>35</sup>

Briggs’s 1875 memory of that conference identified it as another point at which William’s aspiration outran his achievements. Once again—and again fatally—William overestimated his influence among his followers, not only in his grandiose decision to claim the presidency but also in his ill-fated decision to introduce polygamy. According to Briggs, before this conference, William had, both publicly and privately, “uniformly condemned all the excesses known to exist among the different factions [of Mormonism], and especially polygamy.” Thus, Briggs learned with dismay that Smith and Wood “not only believed in the principle of a plurality of wives, but were really in the practice of it stealthily, and under the strongest vows of secrecy.” Using the same system of secrecy and binding oaths, Joseph had managed to practice and secretly teach polygamy in Nauvoo for three years of increasing turbulence; but William seriously miscalculated the reaction of his followers. Briggs recounted with revulsion how, at a meeting well attended by branch leaders, “they threw off the mask, in

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<sup>34</sup>Wood, *Epistle of the Twelve*, 3–7, 18.

<sup>35</sup>Joseph Wood (Palestine Stake of Zion [Ill.]), Letter to Jason W. Briggs, September 30, 1851.

a council called the Priests' Lodge, and confessed to the belief and practice of polygamy in the name of the Lord." Except for a handful of men whom William had covertly initiated into his Priests' Lodge, the remainder of those present at the "council" were thunderstruck by his disclosures. Briggs said that the revelation "created in some minds a terrible conflict between faith and infidelity."<sup>36</sup>

Although the setting was technically secret, there was no controlling the shock-wave that swept through William's disciples. William may have thought that his most popular teaching—lineal succession—would provide enough momentum to override resistance to polygamy; instead, his attempt to introduce polygamy eroded William's claims to supreme authority. Disillusioned, Briggs returned to his home in Beloit, "perplexed with this intermingling of truth and falsehood, of right and wrong; light and darkness." As branch president, he saw that the branch stood "between hope & fear." He was personally "driven to cry unto the [Lord] continually for weeks." seeking "unto God for its solution, in fervent and continued prayer." Finally, on November 18, 1851, "darkness fled & light took its place," as he received a revelation condemning Smith and Wood as false prophets.<sup>37</sup>

The general distaste over polygamy, Briggs's revelation, and his fearless and eloquent preaching over the next several months succeeded in turning most of William's followers away. Briggs energetically distributed his revelation among all the branches of Smith's church, especially those in southern Wisconsin. Joseph Fielding Smith, an assistant Church historian and future LDS apostle and Church president, paid Briggs a backhanded compliment in 1909 by declaring him to be *the* most influential individual after the collapse of Smith's church who "did more than any other one man to bring about that sect"—the RLDS Church. RLDS historians have similarly underscored Briggs's influential role.<sup>38</sup>

William feebly attempted to minimize the damage, backpedaling about what he had disclosed at the October 6 meeting, and argu-

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<sup>36</sup>Jason W. Briggs, "History of the Reorganization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Chapter 1," *The Messenger* 2, no. 1 (November 1875): 1.

<sup>37</sup>Jason W. Briggs (Beloit, Wisc.), Letter to Joseph Smith III, November 20, 1853, microfilm of original, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>38</sup>Joseph Fielding Smith Jr., *Origin of the "Reorganized" Church and the Question of Succession* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909), 17; Roger

ing that he, as Church president, was preeminent in receiving revelation and possessed the exclusive right to cut off dissidents. He called another conference at Palestine Grove on November 24, followed by a third about a week later on December 3. He also wrote to branch leaders in southern Wisconsin, informing them that Briggs was no longer a member in good standing. Briggs countered, as Sheen had done, by quoting William’s own words and explaining that the continued references to the “Celestial Law” in his letters “is a pretended revelation to him, authorizing polygamy.” Though Briggs focused primarily on Smith’s polygamy, Briggs also challenged William’s efforts to expand his role in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints beyond “guardian” to supreme prophet and president.<sup>39</sup>

Briggs’s 1851 revelation became his preaching cornerstone during the 1850s to reject William’s leadership and focus the scattered members’ hope and faith on Joseph Smith III’s eventual leadership. Significantly, the revelation pointed to the important role that William Smith had played up until that time: “And because you have asked me in faith concerning William Smith,” read the revelation, “this is the answer of the Lord thy God concerning him. I, the Lord, have permitted him to represent the rightful heir to the presidency of the high priesthood of my Church by reason of the faith and prayers of his father, and his brothers . . . and to respect the law of lineage, by which the holy priesthood is transmitted. . . . And for this reason have I poured out my Spirit through his [William’s] ministrations, according to the integrity of those who received them.” The revelation does not fail to add, however, that because of “lusts of the flesh” and “adultery,” the Lord had now rejected William Smith. The Saints had no problem with fallen prophets; the prairie had been thick with claimants to Joseph’s mantle who had proved themselves unworthy of it. Nor did they have a problem with waiting in hope and faith for Joseph III to accept his calling. Besides emphasizing the importance of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, the revelation further stipulated that “in mine own due time will I call upon the seed of Jo-

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D. Launius, “Many Mansions”: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Nineteenth-Century Reorganized Church,” *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 154, 162.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 1; Jason W. Briggs, “History of the Reorganization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Chapter II,” *Messenger* 2, no. 2 (December 1875): 1–2; Wm. Smith to Brother Powell, December 25, 1851.

seph Smith, and will bring one forth, and he shall be mighty and strong, and he shall preside over the high priesthood of my Church.”<sup>40</sup>

The clarity of this message cut through William’s flailing attempts to regroup and re-explain. By the fall of 1853, William’s church had disintegrated. Its six-year duration had been a promising movement, meeting genuine spiritual hungers for community among the confused and bewildered former Mormons and, perhaps most importantly, giving William a stage for his genuine charisma and passionate preaching. He thrived on the excitement and adulation he received. But again and again, those closest to him felt betrayed by him and departed in bitter alienation and scorn. This pattern fit William’s high-speed trajectory through group after group.

Since his brothers’ murders in 1844, William had arguably affiliated with more factions of Mormonism than any other single individual. He had linked his aspirations to the Mormonism established by his brother, to Brigham Young’s leadership after Joseph Smith’s death, to George J. Adams in Iowa, to James J. Strang in Wisconsin, to Lyman Wight in Texas, to Isaac Sheen in Kentucky, and to Martin Harris in Ohio. In addition, William had associated with a host of noted dissidents, including Benjamin Winchester, John C. Bennett, William McLellin, Reuben Miller, John E. Page, Jared Carter, Jason W. Briggs, and Zenas H. Gurley, among others. He had additionally formed his own promising offshoot of Mormonism but had undercut its promising expansion by his own misbehavior.

He also intermittently supported Brigham Young’s leadership and the Saints in Utah—who were justifiably suspicious of his overtures. Surrounded by the fragments of his own Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Smith wrote to Young each year from 1854 to 1856, sounding him out about his possible return and making it clear that a condition for such a reconciliation would be the restoration of his apostolic and patriarchal offices.<sup>41</sup> Obviously, he considered himself—the last surviving Smith brother—to be a valuable property; but Young would have none of it. There is no evidence that he ever re-

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<sup>40</sup>Jason W. Briggs, “History of the Reorganization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,” *The Messenger* (Salt Lake City), 2, no. 1 (November 1875): 1.

<sup>41</sup>William Smith (South Hampton, Ill.), Letter to Brigham Young, August 8, 1854; William Smith (Springfield, Ill.), Letter to Brigham Young,

sponded to William’s letters. William’s next move was to associate with Martin Harris who considered himself a Mormon again (despite what can only be described as his own revolving door through several denominations) before he settled in Kirtland and made himself the custodian of the temple. William made several efforts, teaming up with Harris, to revive his church, but to no avail. In 1857, William finally gave up on attempting to reorganize his church.<sup>42</sup> He was forty-six, vigorous, talented, and fatally blinded by pride and insecurity about the best way to use these talents.

William’s travels and Church experience were widespread. In all of his associations, he craved the recognition that he felt his family name merited, and he tried to play a governing role, experimenting with ways of occupying a role of major influence—if not openly seeking supreme leadership—in every organization with which he affiliated. In 1857, as his last attempt at church organizing fell to pieces, William married Eliza Elsie Sanborn at Kirtland, Ohio. Little is known about the quality of the marriage or the meshing of their personalities; but at least the timing was significant. Whether she influenced him directly to give up his insatiable ambition, this marriage represented something of a turning point, a mellowing of his religious ambition, and the abandonment of his fascination with his polygamy. The couple moved the remote area of Clayton County, Iowa, settling in the city of Elkader in 1860, far from any branch of Mormonism. Eliza had four children by her first marriage, for whom William willingly accepted fatherly responsibilities and affection. The couple also had three children: Willie in 1858, Edson, in 1862, and Loie Mae in 1866.<sup>43</sup>

During the 1860s, William continued to avoid this disastrous cycle of religious attachment followed by disaffiliation. He turned to the

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May 7, 1855; William Smith (Turkey River, Iowa), Letter to Brigham Young, July 13, 1856, all letters in Brigham Young Office Files, 1832–78, CR 1234 1, Box 42, fd. 13, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>42</sup>H. Michael Marquardt, “Martin Harris: The Kirtland Years, 1831–1870,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 31–35.

<sup>43</sup>Daughters of the American Revolution, New Connecticut Chapter (Painesville, Ohio), “Probate Court Marriage Records, Lake County, Ohio, 1840–1865,” typescript at the Morley Library, Painesville, Ohio, 102. The entry reads: “Smith, Wm., m., Eliza E. Sanburne, November 12, 1857.” William and Eliza were living in Venango Township, Erie County, Pennsylvania,

more essential but humbler occupation of supporting his family by farming—admittedly not very successfully—near Turkey River in northeastern Iowa. During the last year of the Civil War, he also joined the Union Army in February 1864, obviously misrepresenting his age to enlist (he turned fifty-three the next month), and unsuccessfully seeking appointment as a chaplain.<sup>44</sup>

Also during the 1850s, young Joseph III came to manhood, and the repeated efforts of Zenas Gurley and his son Samuel, brothers Jason and Edmund Briggs, along with W. W. Blair influenced Joseph to give serious consideration for more than seven years to their advancing organization. Although Emma and her second husband, Lewis Bidamon, were earnest Christians in belief and behavior, Emma had been deliberately silent on the Mormon-related experiences of Missouri and Nauvoo—the only periods when her children would have been old enough to have some memories of their own. And she definitely had not encouraged Joseph III to feel himself as heir apparent to the ultimately fatal combination of forces that had brought Joseph's church a skyrocketing number of converts but also his death. When the hopeful Saints of the "New Organization" called a conference at Amboy for April 6, 1860, praying fervently for God to make known His will to young Joseph, Joseph's mature reflection and his own intense and humble spiritual seeking confirmed his call to continue his father's work. Loyally, Emma accompanied him to the conference. As she had given him complete space and time for his reflections, now she gave him her support. He was twenty-seven, and William, at this point, was forty-nine. In what became known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, William would finally find a religious home, though not the exalted position he craved, and was reasonably contented during the last fifteen years of his life.

Attending the conference were core members of William's organization who had continued to hold services in and around William's former headquarters through the decade of the 1850s. This group included members of the Hook family, W. W. Blair, Jason and

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in June 1860, according to the federal census. They moved to Elkader, Iowa, in the latter half of 1860. "OBITUARY. Mrs. Eliza E. Smith of Elkader," *Elkader Weekly Register* 12, no. 18 (March 14, 1889): 1; U.S. Federal Census, Venango Township, Erie County, Pennsylvania, 1061.

<sup>44</sup>Richard P. Howard, ed., *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III (1832-1914)* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1979), 91.

Edmund Briggs, Alvah Smith (no relation to William), Isaac Sheen (who traveled from his home in Cincinnati), Israel Rogers, James Blakeslee, Samuel Powers, John Gaylord, William Marks, Jacob Doan, and Jotham Barrett.<sup>45</sup> Joseph III had arrived from Nauvoo the evening before the conference convened and was hosted by Experience Stone, a Mormon who had been a faithful follower in William’s church and whose deceased relatives were buried in William’s “Mormon” cemetery nearby.<sup>46</sup> Among those to ordain Joseph III were several of William’s former adherents: Zenas Gurley, William Marks, Samuel Powers, and W. W. Blair.<sup>47</sup> In establishing a press, Joseph III and his associates turned to William’s former editor, Isaac Sheen. William’s fingerprints were ubiquitous on the foundations of the RLDS Church.

Although William’s own church disintegrated, he had learned that two ideas appealed strongly to the scattered Saints who had looked to him for leadership: the idea of lineal succession, and restoring the Church to its original “purity” by publicly opposing polygamy. Some of his most prominent adherents pointed to Smith’s role in introducing them to this first idea of succession. “William Smith was gathering up these old members of the church,” recalled Edmund Briggs, Jason’s younger brother. Edmund had become an RLDS

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<sup>45</sup>W. W. Blair (East Paw Paw, Ill.), Letter to Edwin Cadwell, Aaron Hook, and Jotham Barrett, March 7, 1856, P13, f111; Conference Minutes of a Meeting Held in Amboy, Illinois, June 10, 1859, P13, f111 both in Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence.

<sup>46</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 73, 81; Anthony J. Becker, *The Biography of Country Town: USA* (Amboy, Ill.: Spencer-Walker Press, 1954), 118–20. The misspelled “Mormon Cemetery,” is located on the misspelled “Mormon Road,” about a mile south of present-day Amboy.

<sup>47</sup>*History of the Reorganized Church*, 3:251; Howard, *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 184. Samuel Powers and his wife, Maria, lived in Beloit, Wisconsin, and were baptized by Zenas H. Gurley Sr. in 1852. However, Samuel had earlier been “convinced in his heart the Latter Day Saints message was from Heaven, but he rebelled against obeying it.” Either William Smith or his followers at Beloit had played an influential role in Powers’s ultimate conversion, as the Beloit Branch unitedly supported William’s Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints during the two years before Powers’s baptism. Wilcox, *Regathering of the Scattered Saints in Wisconsin and Illinois*, 37–38.



Apostle and was Presiding Bishop in 1892. According to those recollections, Smith had appealed to the former Mormons in Beloit, Wisconsin, by “preaching and teaching the doctrine of lineal priesthood,” and was “the first man that ever taught that [lineal succession] there.”<sup>48</sup> After William’s church collapsed in the early 1850s, Jason W. Briggs and Zenas Gurley, two of his alienated disciples, almost immediately picked up the banner. William may have been a fallen prophet, but the idea of lineal succession rang true to them.

Briggs’s revelation, a founding document of the Reorganization,<sup>49</sup> appropriately credits William as “represent[ing] the rightful heir to the presidency” during those intervening years. Consequently, then Smith’s organization should receive more credit in RLDS history than it has. Admittedly, a check on giving William that credit presents the dilemma of expressing too much enthusiasm for the organization of a fallen prophet who had not only advocated polygamy in Palestine Grove and Covington, but also during his eastern mission in 1843–45, afterwards at Nauvoo, and then again when he had associated with James J. Strang at Voree. Later RLDS histories, like LDS histories, found William Smith’s morals and ambitions distasteful and minimized his influence, except for passing references. For example, Richard P. Howard, RLDS Church historian, stated that Smith’s Church “represented yet another small and isolated move toward reorganizing the church.”<sup>50</sup> Most recently, Community of Christ historian Mark Scherer continued that theme, noting quite cursorily that the “[Jason W.] Briggs group stayed with [William]

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<sup>48</sup>E. C. Briggs, Testimony, *Abstract of Pleading and Evidence in the Circuit Court of the United States, Western Division at Kansas City—The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints vs. The Church of Christ at Independence* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House and Bindery, 1893): 207 (hereafter Temple Lot Case).

<sup>49</sup>Jason W. Briggs’s revelation was reproduced in its entirety in the official history of the Reorganized Church and sanctioned by Joseph Smith III. Joseph Smith III and Heman C. Smith, *History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1805-1890*, 4 vols.; continued by F. Henry Edwards as *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, vols. 5–8 (Independence: Herald House, 1897–1903, (1952 printing), 3:200–204 (hereafter *History of the Reorganized Church*).

<sup>50</sup>Richard P. Howard, *The Church through the Years, Vol. 1* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1992), 331.

Smith for less than a year when they discovered that, like Strang, he also embraced polygamy.”<sup>51</sup> Other histories emphasized how various members very “briefly” affiliated with Smith’s group. Some, like RLDS Apostle Edmund Briggs, sought to completely eliminate William’s role in the evolution of the RLDS Church, even denying that Jason ever affiliated with William’s church, although the record clearly shows that Jason had served as an ardent apostle from 1850 to 1851.<sup>52</sup> The truth was that William Smith had more influence than Reorganization historians have been comfortable attributing to him, as dozens of Joseph III’s earliest followers could credit William for reinvigorating their faith in Mormonism.

Most of William’s followers continued in the faith of what he had taught them even after they considered him a fallen prophet and denied his leadership. When they petitioned Joseph III to assume the position of prophet-president, they were speaking for a tenet that William had promoted recurrently for nearly eight years after the murders of his brothers. Those who had affiliated with William’s church and who then embraced the Reorganization, read like a who’s who in early RLDS Church history: the three Briggs brothers (Jason W., Edmund, and Silas), Zenas H. Gurley, James Blakeslee, W. W. Blair, William Marks, Israel Rogers, Isaac Sheen, Jotham Barrett, Edwin Cadwell, Jacob Doane, Experience Stone and her sons Stephen and Lardner, as well as host of others.<sup>53</sup> While it was William Smith who united these future influential leaders around the idea of lineal succession, it was Joseph III who, blessed with the patience and prudence that William lacked, reaped the ultimate harvest. It was William who had successfully instilled in many of these founding members of the Reorganization the conviction that the presidency should pass from father to son—a doctrine that became a cornerstone of the Reorganization. RLDS historian Alma R. Blair wrote that, while those who eventually joined the Reorganization “were united in their stance against polygamy and in their belief in the authority of their new

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<sup>51</sup>Mark A. Scherer, *The Journey of a People: The Era of Reorganization, 1844 to 1946* (Independence: Community of Christ Seminary Press, 2013), 80–81.

<sup>52</sup>Edmund C. Briggs, Testimony, *The Temple Lot Case*, 207.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 146; Howard, ed., *Memoirs of Joseph Smith III*, 184. Jason Briggs and W. W. Blair were both designated apostles in William Smith’s church.

prophet,” it was “the idea of lineal succession [that] proved most fruitful in combining them and the structure which had emerged.”<sup>54</sup> The RLDS Church adopted what William had most strongly promulgated in his teachings, including his public renunciation of polygamy.

William had successfully gathered a strong group of Mormons scattered throughout Illinois and Wisconsin at and around Palestine Grove in Lee County, Illinois. It served as his headquarters from 1847 to 1853. In 1854 the community was renamed Amboy, centered slightly apart from Palestine Grove so that it could establish its business center close to the railroad, which arrived in November 1854.<sup>55</sup> The irony was that William himself would not be present to participate in these foundational RLDS events.

In fact, William had made another foray into Mormonism, being rebaptized LDS in the spring of 1860 (exact date not known), about the same time as the official organization of the RLDS Church. Though details are skimpy, a J. J. Butler performed the ordinance, obviously without the approval of the First Presidency in Utah; but no contemporary account of the conversations, conditions, or immediate results of this rite have been preserved.<sup>56</sup> William’s financial situation likely prevented him from immediately moving west, and he also had well-founded doubts that Brigham Young and the Twelve would restore him to his prominent ecclesiastical offices. They had, in fact, appointed Joseph Sr.’s brother John, then John’s namesake son, as presiding patriarch.<sup>57</sup> Would they undo this action or make another kind of adjustment to welcome someone as volatile as William? Furthermore, William had earlier (1847) made such an appointment a

<sup>54</sup>Alma R. Blair, “The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: Moderate Mormons,” in *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History*, edited by F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1992), 211.

<sup>55</sup>Becker, *The Biography of a Country Town*, 107–14.

<sup>56</sup>Brigham Young Office Journal, May 14, 1850, CR 1234 1, Box 72, fd, 5, LDS Church History Library, reads: “A. Carrington came in and read a letter from Wm. Smith, bro. of the Prophet, in which he desired to come to the valley and be restored to his former associations. He stated he had been rebaptized. Another letter was also read from a J. J. Butler stating he had baptized Wm. Smith, and that his [William’s] course had been to sustain the authorities of this Church.”

<sup>57</sup>Irene M. Bates and E. Gary Smith, *Lost Legacy: The Mormon Office of*

condition for returning to the LDS Church and immigrating to Utah, and it is probably fair to say that Brigham Young was unwilling to accommodate such demands.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, only months—perhaps only weeks—later, William learned that Joseph III had accepted the presidency over a movement that promised to become a full-fledged church. One can only imagine William’s thoughts as he contemplated the horns of this particular dilemma. For an individual who currently felt unrecognized and unappreciated for his service, he must have felt rejected, even insulted, to be excluded from these landmark events. He had ample reason to know that Briggs and Gurley viewed him with suspicion and would not have welcomed his participation, but he probably assumed that his nephew would, at some point, extend a formal invitation to him—including a position in his organization. Joseph III, however, made no such move and never explained, in any account that I have found, the motives for his reticence. However, he was well aware of William’s flamboyant, self-serving, and morally questionable history and was exercising considerable caution where his unstable uncle was concerned.

For his part, William doubtless leaped to the conclusion that his former followers who were now affiliating with the Reorganized Church had delivered disparaging reports to young Joseph. His inflated sense of self-importance did not allow him to admit that even a strictly factual report about his activities since 1845 would have been troubling to Joseph III and to the sincere and humble Church members now gathering around the new prophet. William’s prickly sensitivities slipped out in letters he wrote almost a decade later, persistently shadowing his fifteen-year affiliation with the Reorganization.<sup>59</sup>

In July 1860, the newly baptized William, who had obviously received no messages of welcome from Utah, decided to take the first step toward the new organization. He wrote to Joseph III, shrewdly

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*Presiding Patriarch* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 104–50.

<sup>58</sup>William Smith (St. Louis), Letter to Orson Hyde, June 22, 1847, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>59</sup>See, for example, William B. Smith (Elkader, Iowa), Letter to Dear Nephew [Joseph Smith III], October 16, 1868, in *True Latter Day Saints’ Herald* 1, no. 15 (January 1, 1869): 22–23.

positioning himself as a supporter: "I shall sustain your present position as the lawful head and leader of the Mormon Church." He also complained in the letter that Brigham Young had taken "spoils" from Nauvoo, including William's own "property." William claimed, "I wrote to him to remunerate me for some of the losses I had sustained in the break-up of the Church, and you can see how willing the man is to get influence from the Smith family." William was probably referring to Young's completely ignoring his half-hearted petitions for reinstatement during 1854–56. Despite his LDS baptism, William must have deduced, by this point, that Brigham Young was not going to restore him to the Twelve or to the patriarchy, so he openly angled for a position in Joseph III's movement. He appealed to his nephew's sympathy by recounting some of their common grievances toward Brigham Young and the Saints in the West but made exaggerated claims that he had received "many invitations to join them [Salt Lake Mormons], from delegates sent from Salt Lake." This claim was an obvious ploy to heighten Joseph's interest in soliciting William's participation in the RLDS Church. William then assured the recently installed president: "I am your friend . . . and be assured, Joseph, that I have no feelings against you or any of those who have joined in with you."<sup>60</sup>

The other challenge William faced if he were to join the RLDS Church was overcoming the opposition from his former followers who had been repelled by his disclosures about polygamy and his personal ambition. He obliquely addressed this issue in his letter when he mentioned that he held no animosity toward those who had joined with the Reorganization.<sup>61</sup> William was clearly anxious to determine what feelings RLDS leaders held toward him, and he made it clear that he was available for membership and, obviously, high office. If Joseph III responded, his letter has not survived, but he had William's letter published immediately—almost certainly because of William's complaints about Brigham Young and to show that this last remaining Smith brother was his supporter. The fact of publication, with or without Joseph III's comments, evinced at least tacit support. One wonders how Isaac Sheen, newly appointed editor of the *True Latter Day Saints' Herald*, felt about publishing William's letter, given the

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<sup>60</sup>"Wm. Smith's Contradiction of Utah Rumor," *True Latter Day Saints' Herald* 1, no. 7 (July 1860): 172.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

acrimonious end of their relationship ten years earlier.

A short time after William wrote Joseph III this first letter, he confronted his nephew over what William must have considered slander and enmity, but which Joseph III doubtless considered full justification for treating his uncle warily. In Joseph III's memoirs, dictated in 1911–14 when he was in his early eighties, he recounted in general terms that, in 1856, he received “documentary evidence” from Edmund C. Briggs and Samuel H. Gurley about William's Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at Palestine Grove. Almost certainly, Briggs and Gurley would have included William's shattering revelation in October 1851 supporting polygamy. The congregation had rejected William's leadership, though not Mormonism per se; and Briggs and Gurley had used this painful episode to petition Joseph III to assume presidency of the Church. Joseph did not describe the contents in detail in his memoir (and flatly rejected this effort at persuasion), but he described the “documentary evidence” as involving William's “several religious movements,” primarily “his career at Binghamton [Palestine Grove] and in Lee County, and his work in connection with one Joseph Wood, Aaron Hook, and others.”<sup>62</sup> Edmund's brother Jason had documented much of William's morally dubious activities, which had led to the dissolution of Smith's church and had followed Smith's movement for several years afterwards.

Joseph III later referred to the collection in an interview with Salt Lake Mormon David Seeley: “William Smith, father's brother, attempted organization, and to build up and gather a church together; once at Covington, KY., and afterwards at Binghamton or Palestine Grove, Illinois; both failed, and both suffered persecution from which, Wm Smith fled and stayed away until it blew over; part of which persecution, was for things of a similar nature to those for which your people now suffer [i.e., polygamy]; and of which I do not care to inform you, though I hold the evidence to prove them.”<sup>63</sup> In short, Joseph III undoubtedly had evidence in his custody that William had practiced polygamy.

How William learned that his nephew had these materials is not known, but it triggered the confrontation, their first known face-

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<sup>62</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 184.

<sup>63</sup>Joseph Smith III (San Bernardino, Calif.), Interviewed by David Seeley (Utah Mormon), January 1889, Miscellany Collection, P19, fd. 47, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

to-face meeting since 1848 when Joseph III was in his mid-teens. According to Joseph III, William “came to Nauvoo and demanded their surrender.” William certainly wanted to distance himself from his history of polygamy and his legal difficulties connected to his Church organization in Lee County. But Joseph III refused to relinquish the documents, as he felt that they were “placed in my hands without reservation, or obligation on my part to make any specific use of it.” William was furious and, as a result, Joseph wrote, William “remained aloof from me until several years after I identified myself with the Reorganization.”<sup>64</sup> Whether this quarrel occurred before or after Joseph published William’s July 1860 letter complaining about Brigham Young and angling for a position in Joseph’s church is not clear. However, it does explain why William retreated from all branches of Mormonism for several years and why Joseph III was content with that distance.

Then, typically, time smoothed out William’s ruffled feelings. By the latter part of 1868, while William was living in Elkader, Iowa, and Joseph was living at Plano, Illinois, “relations of a more or less friendly character were then established between us; he visited me from time to time, and so far as I was concerned no significance or ulterior motive on his part was attributed to these visits.” During some of these exchanges, the fifty-seven-year-old uncle and his thirty-six-year-old nephew discussed their differing ideas of what should be included in the newly established Reorganization.<sup>65</sup> In a letter William penned to his nephew on October 16, 1868, he indicated that “some-time I will tell you where I think your plan of church building in this New Organization is at fault.”<sup>66</sup> Certainly one of these differences had to do with William’s perspective on the office of patriarch, and his continuing hope to be appointed an apostle. Judging from future correspondence, other Church items that may have been a part of their discussions included vicarious work for the dead, the temple endowment, and opposition to polygamy, which both men recognized as a foundation stone of the Reorganization. Joseph III described their differences thus: “In our interviews he frankly stated his objection to certain movements of the Reorganized Church, and I as frank-

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<sup>64</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of Joseph Smith III*, 184.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>William Smith to Dear Nephew, October 16, 1868.

ly maintained their necessity and integrity."<sup>67</sup>

In reality, William was too late to have much of a voice in what offices or practices might be included in the Reorganization. Most of these issues had been decided by the early 1860s. Though he had often got his way in his various ventures in other factions of Mormonism, William met his match in his nephew. While the two relatives had divergent personalities in many ways, both men shared the quality of holding firmly to their viewpoints. Joseph III was not about to be coerced into accepting William's views regarding Church offices or practices; and having obtained William's papers from Briggs and Gurley, he knew what William had been trying to accomplish in his own affiliations and short-lived organization. He remained wary of his Uncle William and his ambition.<sup>68</sup>

While feelings between the two men gradually improved on the personal plane, William continued to remain distant from the Reorganization. His occasional letters expressed interest in what was transpiring in the emerging church, but he had no other ties with any branch of Mormonism when he settled in Elkader, Iowa. His LDS baptism changed nothing in his relations with the Utah Church. In October 1868, William explained to Joseph III: "According to my philosophy on the true plan of salvation to save all men, I am not in sympathy (very strongly) with any of the present organized bands of Mormons, your own not excepted. Still out of respect to yourself, and that of your father's family, I would not impede your progress." His prickly pride was still wounded by the fact that many of his former followers now formed the nucleus of the Reorganized Church's leadership. He felt that these men had rejected him and did not appreciate his earlier labors. William also revealed these feelings in a sharply worded complaint in the same letter: "You may also judge that I seek not the society of those who have so meanly misrepresented my acts, and doings, while I was honestly and sincerely laboring to save the church from the monstrous imposition of Brighamism." Then, he protested, but without much conviction: "Lest some of your adherents . . . think that I am swinging for a place (seat) in the New Organization, I would inform them that I am satisfied perfectly with my present position; and

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<sup>67</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of Joseph Smith III*, 184.

<sup>68</sup>Paul M. Edwards highlights many of William's interactions with Joseph III in his "William B. Smith: The Persistent 'Pretender,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 128-39.



should I hereafter seek a change in . . . connection with any religious class of professors, I think that I could suit myself much better than to unite with any class of L. D. Saints or Mormons that I have any knowledge of at present.”<sup>69</sup> Joseph III’s answer, if he responded, has not survived, but he certainly knew better than to take this lofty lament at face value. Despite these denials, William deeply yearned to be recognized and elevated to a prominent position in the RLDS Church, just as he had consistently sought a similar goal in every church with which he had affiliated since his excommunication in Nauvoo in 1845. In November 1872 he declared, “I most cordially endorse the Reorganization” and affirmed his belief that Joseph III was the “legal” president of the Church, even though William himself was still formally unaffiliated.<sup>70</sup> It is not known whether any visitors or correspondents suggested that he become a member of the New Organization, but his own letters continue to protest his religious independence.

In spite of his distance from any particular branch of Mormonism, William’s persisting faith in its doctrine compelled him to undertake what he described as a “mission” in Delaware County, Iowa, in 1873, during which he preached at least fourteen different sermons on Mormonism. “These meetings were well attended,” described William in a letter to Joseph III, “while much prejudice was removed from the minds of the people; and . . . I could soon make many additions to the faith in these parts.” This missionary success was William’s effort to persuade Joseph III to give him a prominent role in the developing Church. “At present I have not invited any to baptism,” William continued, “for the reason that I choose not to do so, until there is a more perfect understanding and fellowship with the Reorganized Church on this matter.” Though he expressed support of his nephew’s church in several letters during the early 1870s, he made it clear that his full support was contingent on being granted an important office. Toward

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<sup>69</sup>William Smith to Dear Nephew, October 16, 1868.

<sup>70</sup>William B. Smith (Elkader, Iowa), Letter to Respected Nephew [Joseph Smith III], November 11, 1872, in *True Latter Day Saints’ Herald* 19, no. 23 (December 1, 1872): 723, averred: “I do most cordially endorse the Reorganization; and further state now, as I always have done from the time of the great apostasy in 1844 and 1845, that the legal presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, belongs of right, to the oldest son of the martyred prophet, Joseph Smith, who was the first prophet of the church, and the [one] called of God.”

the end of this letter, William probed, “Joseph, you can do as you think best, if I can be of any use or benefit to the Church, you can place my name before the Church for admission.”<sup>71</sup> Like the feelers he had extended toward Brigham Young two decades earlier, William was offering a *quid pro quo*: his full support of the Reorganization with whatever influence his Smith name and family connection could bring in exchange for reinstatement in his coveted priesthood offices. Joseph III had no trouble deciphering the proposed bargain. William had already signed “Patriarch,” to one of his letters to Joseph, evincing his belief that he still held the office.<sup>72</sup> Although Joseph was manifestly unwilling to take William’s advice on organization and doctrinal aspects of the Reorganization, William urged Joseph to visit him in Elkader, Iowa, and preach. “There are many here who would be glad to hear you speak,” wrote William, “and [I] would procure the Church in Elkader for you to speak in.” He concluded his invitation by warmly encouraging Joseph III to “think me your friend” and again repeated his urgent invitation to “come, come and see us.”<sup>73</sup> Joseph III reciprocated William’s warmth by publishing his letters in the Church’s newspaper, thus keeping his uncle’s name periodically before the members, but he otherwise remained cautious. He never traveled to Elkader and, as nearly as can be reconstructed from the correspondence, he never wrote first and sometimes did not respond at all, except to have William’s letters published.

Either there is a gap in the correspondence or William allowed five more years to pass before he again wrote to his nephew in January 1878. This time, he spelled out his expectations should he unite with the Reorganization. Though William’s letter has not survived, Joseph III’s answer on January 12, 1878, identifies two of William’s “propositions.” He apparently appealed to be restored to the office of presiding patriarch, including an expanded role as part of the First Presidency, much like Hyrum at the time of his death. William also wanted to be recognized as an apostle, with all of the original author-

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<sup>71</sup>Wm. B. Smith (Elkader, Iowa), Letter to Joseph [Smith III], December 12, 1873, *True Latter Day Saints’ Herald* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 1874): 19–20.

<sup>72</sup>William Smith to Respected Nephew, November 11, 1872; Edwards, “William B. Smith,” 132.

<sup>73</sup>William Smith to Dear Nephew, October 16, 1868.

ity he had held in his brother's church. Joseph's answer quickly deflated William's aspirations. According to Joseph, the Quorum of the Twelve had been dissolved by Brigham Young's exodus to Utah. While this "did not destroy individual baptism, nor necessarily individual priesthood," explained Joseph III, "the character of that priesthood, and the particular office in it, must in all cases be determined upon the consideration and examination of each individual case." As for William's "proposition" to become part of the governing council of the RLDS Church, Joseph III observed, perhaps wryly, that he (Joseph III) "already had the compliment [of] . . . having been appointed by revelation." "Besides this," cautioned Joseph III, "you are now well advanced in years, [and] the time for you to have attempted an organized resistance to the Reorganization if ever contemplated by you, is past. . . . The prestige of my fathers name now belongs to me, and it is now assured to me."<sup>74</sup>

While Joseph III was blunt enough to make it clear that William had very little to contribute to the Church organization and that no office would be bestowed upon him, he was perceptive enough to recognize William's desire to unite with the Reorganization. After sternly spelling out that William's conditions for membership would not be met, he then warmly opened the door to William on his status as a member: "I stand ready to welcome you into the church with both hands," wrote Joseph III, "and I am also willing to endorse any legitimate act done by you, that clear proff [proof], or the spirit testifies to be correct." The RLDS president further described how formally linking William's name with the Reorganization would vindicate his "honor and integrity . . . with a recognition of your office as an High Priest, the highest grade known to the Melchisedek Priesthood, and carrying with it the right to officiate in every ministerial office in the church." He urged, "Now is your golden opportunity to throw the power of your mind, and the influence of your name into the scale in favor of the work, for which your honorable place is rapidly being made." He then, intriguingly, dangled dazzling possibilities before his uncle: "I am ready to recognize you publicly in this office [High Priest], at once; leaving the question of apostleship, and patriarchate to be settled subsequently, as the necessity of the case may demand,

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<sup>74</sup>Joseph Smith III, Letter to William B. Smith, January 12, 1878, in Joseph Smith III Letterbook 1, 275–79, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

wisdom direct, or the spirit command.”<sup>75</sup>

This cordial invitation—stressing the influence of William’s name and family connection and the “golden opportunity” which would give him an “honorable place”—though not the titles William coveted—certainly appealed to William, who had felt undermined and rejected by all factions of Mormonism for many years. Joseph III adeptly checked William’s office-seeking, which had been an unsavory aspect of his religious activities for more than thirty years, but simultaneously promised him an honored place, though its dimensions were not specified, if he formally affiliated. William almost certainly interpreted the offer of an “honorable place” as the first step in on-going negotiations which, he must have flattered himself, he could win.

Joseph III recognized the strength and credibility that the Reorganization would receive if all remaining members of his father’s immediate family united with the Reorganization. Five years earlier, Joseph III had made personal visits to William’s sister Katharine, then a sixty-year-old widow living in Fountain Green, Illinois. He invited her to formally unite with the RLDS Church, an invitation she accepted; and he personally officiated in baptizing and confirming her.<sup>76</sup> RLDS members came to view her as a living link between the Church Joseph Smith had established and the Reorganization; and in her later years, she would occasionally be asked to share her recollections of early Mormon history, once at a session of the annual RLDS Church conference.<sup>77</sup>

William’s two remaining sisters, Sophronia (who died in 1876) and Lucy (who died in 1882), were received into the RLDS Church in April 1873 on their original baptisms, but they were living in Colchester, McDonough County, Illinois, and only minimally participated in the Reorganization, since there were no RLDS branches in their lo-

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>“The Record of the Pilot Grove [Illinois] Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of L.D.S.,” entry for June 17, 1873, 25, Community of Christ Library-Archives. The entry in the minutes reads: “Catherine Salisbury Born at Wind[s]or Co Vermont Rebaptised at Colchester McDonough Co. Illinois June 17th 1873 By Joseph Smith Confirmed same Day. Same place by Joseph Smith.”

<sup>77</sup>Kyle R. Walker, “Katharine Smith Salisbury’s Recollections of Joseph’s Meetings with Moroni,” *BYU Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002): 4–17.

cale.<sup>78</sup> But William's case was unique among the remaining Smiths, because William's sisters did not have any desire for station nor, in fact, was there much of a formal role for RLDS women in terms of leadership. In addition, Joseph III had firsthand knowledge of William's troubling history. From the beginning of their relationship, Joseph III was perceptive enough to know he must handle William's reinstatement prudently, particularly as William's ambition for prominence and important office had not been tempered by time.

A few months later, Joseph III invited William to attend an RLDS conference during the first week in April 1878, in Plano, Illinois, which he had made Church headquarters in 1865. William not only accepted the invitation but arrived early with the goal of having significant conversations about the offices he could expect if he were to unite with the Reorganization. Joseph III hosted William in his own home in Plano and showed no reluctance to discuss William's wishes in a prolonged conversation that lasted several days. William pressed his proposals, but Joseph continued to tactfully check William's ambition and deflect his request for station. Recalling this episode in his memoirs, Joseph III described their maneuvers: "He demanded to be received into the church upon his former membership, to be allowed to retain his standing as an apostle, and that his several attempts at church rebuilding should be recognized by us." Joseph III clearly foresaw the disruption that would follow from placing William in a position of authority, due to William's combative personality and competing aspirations. He countered by pointing out the much more active, democratic role that the conference played in RLDS affairs. Joseph III explained: "While we might be willing to receive him [William] into fellowship on his original baptism, his priesthood standing among us would have to be determined by the conference." He also felt that it would be a serious mistake to sanction William's earlier church-building efforts, since so many of them, including William's own church, had crashed on the rock of polygamy. As a result, Joseph cautiously stipulated that "whatever work he [William] had done in church building was to be frankly and openly examined, its recogni-

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<sup>78</sup>*History of the Reorganized Church*, 4:3–4. See also Gracia N. Jones, "Sophronia Smith Stoddard McCleary," and Nathan H. Williams, "Lucy Smith Millikin," both in Kyle R. Walker, ed., *United by Faith: The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications/Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2006), 193, 421–23.



*Stone Church in Plano. This early RLDS meetinghouse was dedicated in November 1868. The original pews and pulpit are still in use by the local Community of Christ congregation. Photograph by Kyle R. Walker.*

tion and acceptance, wholly or in part, to depend upon its nature, quality, and value to or effect upon the church itself, as might be determined after such examination and analysis.”<sup>79</sup>

This wariness and the involvement from the beginning of others—many of whom had witnessed William’s chaotic behavior during the 1840s and 1850s—was not the response William desired, even though he must have anticipated it based on their earlier communications. He may have hoped that his share of Smith charisma could charm his nephew during their face-to-face meetings and override Joseph III’s objections. But in a rare moment of realistic evaluation, he must have understood that being formally reunited with a faction of Mormonism, no matter what restrictions it came with, would bring him some of the recognition he had lacked for more than twenty-five years. Another kindly act by Joseph III may have softened William’s feelings toward his nephew. Though Jo-

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<sup>79</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 184–85.

seph III never returned the Briggs and Gurley papers related to William's Palestine Grove church, he returned William's personal journal, which Isaac Sheen had been holding.<sup>80</sup> The journal had been taken from William's trunk when he and Sheen had parted ways in the spring of 1850, and William was relieved to finally have this record of the earliest incidents of his life, which he used in composing his 1883 autobiographical account, *William Smith on Mormonism*.<sup>81</sup>

The two Smiths, though cordial, remained at an impasse as the conference commenced in the stone church in Plano, on April 5, 1878. Joseph III continued to stand firm by his former offer: membership recognized upon William's previous baptism, and confirmation of his office as a high priest, but nothing more alluring. "Thus we stood upon these differences when conference convened," recollected Joseph III, "and for the first few days of the session. He seemed determined that I should pledge myself to an unqualified reception and acceptance of him and of his work, while I was equally firm in my position not to recognize, endorse, or approve any such work until a full knowledge of the facts concerning it, frankly presented and thoroughly canvassed, should warrant us in doing so." In taking this position, Joseph had the full support of other officers in the Reorganization. Consequently, three days into the conference William reluctantly gave in. According to Joseph III, "he authorized me to present to the assembly his request to be received upon his original bap-

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<sup>80</sup>Isaac Sheen's son John recollected: "William's Journal was given to him [William] when he came to Plano, Ill., in 1878." John K. Sheen, *Polygamy: or, The Veil Lifted* (York, Neb.: N.pub., 1889), 15.

<sup>81</sup>William's holograph journal has not been located, but evidence that he used it is that he had earlier said Oliver Cowdery baptized him at Fayette, New York, on June 9, 1830. "William B. Smith. Experience and Testimony," *Saints' Herald* 30, no. 24 (June 16, 1883): 388. However, after reading his journal, he correctly identified David Whitmer as having performed the ordinance. William Smith (Osterdock, Iowa), Letter to Edmund Levi Kelley, March 12, 1892, Community of Christ Library-Archives. Even after he had published his history, in which he correctly identified David Whitmer as his baptizer, he had mistakenly mentioned Cowdery as the individual who had baptized him in an earlier letter to Edmund Kelley written in 1892, afterwards correcting the mistake.

tism.”<sup>82</sup> Joseph III turned the final decision about William’s reception into the RLDS Church over to a committee of three men, none of whom had been damaged directly by William’s earlier chaotic behavior, although all of them were in a position to have knowledge of it: Elijah Banta, William H. Kelley, and George A. Blakeslee. The committee duly considered William’s case and recommended that he be received as a member on his original baptism which had been performed in Fayette, New York, on June 9, 1830.

Joseph III apparently reserved to himself the decision of which priesthood office should accompany William’s reception. On April 8, 1878, William was received as an official member of the Reorganized Church and, in accord with Joseph III’s earlier offer, allowed to “occupy . . . the office of High Priest.”<sup>83</sup> After eighteen years of being unaffiliated with any movement of Mormonism, William was gratified, rejoicing in a degree of the recognition that he had so ardently desired for decades. “We had the benefit of his experience, testimony, and wisdom,” Joseph III summarized of his uncle’s acceptance of the Reorganization, “and were pleased to have what prestige his name and former connections brought to us.”<sup>84</sup> After nearly two decades of posturing, William was electrified to have a visible place in the RLDS Church and threw his whole effort into support of the movement.

Within a year of his linking himself with his nephew’s church, and notwithstanding he was nearing his sixty-eighth birthday, William began a lengthy six-month mission to Iowa and Missouri as a demonstration of his newfound commitment. Though he had preached both Christian and Mormon sermons near his home in

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<sup>82</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 184–85. See note 81 for the correct identification of David Whitmer as having baptized William.

<sup>83</sup>The committee reported: “We, your committee appointed to consider the propriety of receiving William B. Smith into the church on his original baptism, respectfully report and recommend that said William B. Smith be so received as a member; and upon the rule long since obtained and acted upon by the Reorganization, namely, that ‘it is a matter of conscience’ upon the part of the individual as to his being rebaptized when once it is shown that he has received a legal baptism, we report that satisfactory evidence shows that said William B. Smith was baptized by Oliver Cowdery, in the early days of the church.” Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 184–85.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 185.



Elkader, he had not actively proselyted as a missionary for any particular church organization in more than twenty years. A gifted preacher, William relished meeting with Saints, holding curious audiences spellbound, and receiving the deference of RLDS members who enjoyed this connection to Mormonism's founder.

Smith began his mission on New Year's Day 1879,<sup>85</sup> preaching first at Montrose, Iowa. While preaching in the city, he made the effort to cross the Mississippi River and visit Emma Hale Smith Bidamon and her husband, Lewis, at Nauvoo, just four months before Emma's death.<sup>86</sup> Thirty years earlier, William had asked Emma and Lewis to look after his property in Plymouth, Illinois; not only had they refused, but Lewis had scoffed at his religious efforts and William had stormed out of Nauvoo.<sup>87</sup> William did not record the details of this 1879 visit, but apparently they had let bygones slip away.

Five years later in 1884, William recounted another cordial visit with Lewis and his second wife.<sup>88</sup> From Nauvoo, William continued his labors at the RLDS branch across the Mississippi River at Montrose. His effectiveness as a missionary was evidenced when several who listened to him preach desired baptism but decided to wait until

<sup>85</sup> Wm. B. Smith (Keokuk, Iowa) Letter to Dear Nephew [Joseph Smith III], May 28, 1879, *Saints' Herald* 26, no. 13 (July 1, 1879): 206.

<sup>86</sup> William Smith (Hannibal, Mo.), Letter to Joseph [Smith III], Dear Nephew, January 25, 1879, *Saints' Herald* 26, no. 4 (February 15, 1879): 62.

<sup>87</sup> William Smith (Osterdock, Iowa), Letter to Edmund Levi Kelley, October 3, 1892, Community of Christ Library-Archives: "I visited Nauvoo in [18]47 [or] 48—tried to get Bidamon to look after [my property] but know he was to[o] Infidel to do anything laughed and mad[e] fun of religion—while I set at his table and asked me what [I] thought of the mistakes of Moses, I became disgusted with him—so never called on him—again—untill here in very late-years."

<sup>88</sup> Of his 1886 visit to Nauvoo, William commented: "On Monday, July 5th, called on Major Bidamon, in Nauvoo, Illinois, and took tea with him and [second] wife [Nancy Ambercrombie]. The Major showed me over the grounds where some of our relatives were laid away for their final resting place. Nauvoo is now a city of vineyards, with many houses still empty. The sad reminiscences that crowded my memory did not create in me a very strong desire to remain long in the city." William Smith (La Crosse, Ill.), Letter to Joseph Smith III, July 17, 1886, *Saints' Herald* 33, no. 30 (July 31, 1886): 469–70.



*Emma Hale Smith  
Bidamon, ca. 1870. Wil-  
liam visited Emma at  
Nauvoo in January 1879,  
just months before her death  
on April 30. Photo courtesy  
of Mary Dennis.*

the spring thaw broke up the ice still clogging the Mississippi River. Smith reported to Joseph III: “Waiting for a change in the climate, for a week’s time, or two weeks, would not materially damage a brother or sister’s faith in case they were honest and true-hearted believers in the work; and if they were not, it is just as well that such saints should back out before obeying the gospel, as for them to back out after they have joined themselves to the body of Christ.”<sup>89</sup>

William continued south to Keokuk, where the RLDS Saints had established a larger congregation and had “a very neat and comely house for public worship.” Word of his coming had preceded him, as RLDS Apostle John H. Lake ensured that William’s preaching appointments were advertised in the local paper. William preached every evening for a week and recorded that his hearers manifested “more than becoming interest.” He felt that his visit not only strengthened the Saints in the area but helped instill in others a desire to know

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<sup>89</sup>Smith to Joseph, Dear Nephew, January 25, 1879.

more about the RLDS faith.<sup>90</sup>

William was at Hannibal, Missouri, on January 25, where he stayed with a John Taylor, president of the RLDS branch, while he preached. He then headed directly west, visiting Saints near Bevier, Brookfield, and Hamilton, then reached Kingston in March, in the heart of Caldwell County, Missouri. A letter has survived from William to Richard Randall, who was caring for a brother who had gone insane. William knew something of the burden of caring for an incapacitated loved one from the lengthy terminal illness of his first wife, Caroline Grant. With the empathy born of experience, Smith wrote tenderly to Randall, “This must be a seveal trial for you and I sympathise with you in this your trouble it cirtingly must place a great burden upon your mind and I pray my father in heaven that he will give you strength to endure this—and give you patience—while you labour to discharge your duty towards a kindred relative so near to household life.”<sup>91</sup>

Traveling through Missouri called up memories of earlier incidents in Mormonism’s troubled history in that state. William had first traversed the state in 1834 as part of Zion’s Camp, then again in 1837, when he accompanied Joseph and Hyrum as the Saints were beginning to settle in northern Missouri. By the summer of 1838, the entire Smith clan had settled in northern Missouri, only to be driven from the state during the winter of 1838–39. At the time, William had accepted his brother’s revelations appointing the land of Missouri as the location of the Saints’ Zion, where they would build the New Jerusalem as prophesied by John the Revelator (Rev. 3:12, 21:2). Like many early Mormons who clung to Joseph Smith’s revelations, William anticipated that his brother’s prophecies about Missouri would be realized during his lifetime. It had been a matter of discussion in William’s correspondence with Lyman Wight in 1848–51. Wight was also passionate to see the holy city established. When William arrived in Caldwell County in the spring of 1879 and preached to the Saints at Kingston, just a few miles from Far West, it rekindled his desire to see the Saints return to their promised Zion. He wrote excitedly to Joseph Smith III in March 1879: “Tell the Saints through the *Herald*, if admis-

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>William Smith (Brookfield, Mo.), Letter to Richard Randall, February 13, 1879, Richard Randall Papers, 1878–1914, MS 5764, LDS Church History Library.

sible, that Zion in Missouri is *redeemed*; and that the feelings and spirit of the people in this Far West district, as almost universally expressed, are ‘Come in, come in, ye Mormon Saints, and possess the goodly land.’”<sup>92</sup> William was obviously taking this hospitable attitude rather optimistically and urged Joseph III, “All around the old city of Far West land and farms are for sale, and at reasonable figures; and such is the civilized condition of the country, that Saints can purchase land and live on it without molestation.” Enthusiastically he described Far West’s “beauty for landscape and richness of soil. This is a great farming country, stock of every kind, and fruit and honey. For the last forty years the timber has grown in great abundance, splendid groves near the city, mark the spots where forty years ago, there was nothing but bare prairie; once patches of hazle brakes, but now beautiful groves of timber, large enough for rails or other uses have grown up for fire or farming purposes.”<sup>93</sup>

With fiery enthusiasm, he appointed a meeting to be held on March 30, 1879, at the Far West temple site. There, standing on one of the temple cornerstones,<sup>94</sup> William preached to a large crowd of Saints and interested country people. Filled with millennial fervor and a keen sense of the injustices he had experienced decades earlier, William recounted the history of the Saints at Far West. The enthralled audience listened to his firsthand, though certainly enhanced, recollections of his participation in the ceremony of laying the temple cornerstones on July 4, 1838, “at a time when the blood of the Saints was made to drench this Missouri soil.” He concluded: “A more civilized spirit has taken possession of the masses of the people of the state of Missouri,” and we then “invite our brothers in the East and elsewhere, to emigrate to this land and secure their inheritances in Zion, by purchase.”<sup>95</sup> It was a nostalgic experience for Smith who had once owned property in the area, and it would be the highlight of his mission. The Church’s response did not match Smith’s enthusiasm, and Joseph Smith III almost certainly had marked reservations

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<sup>92</sup>Wm B. Smith (Kingston, Mo.), Letter to the Editor, ca. March 1879, *Saints’ Herald* 26, no. 8 (April 15, 1879): 125.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup>Wm. B. Smith, Letter to the Editor, ca. March 1879.

<sup>95</sup>William’s sermon at Far West was later published in the official *History of the RLDS Church*, 4:253–54.

against allowing William to encourage and direct immigration and settlement.

Whether William was cognizant of it, while he preached in Kingston and Far West he was less than twenty miles from his divorced wife Roxey Ann, who had not remarried, and was now living in Lathrop with her two children by William, Thalia and H. Wallace, who were now thirty and twenty-eight respectively. It seems probable that word would have reached Roxey Ann and the children that William was preaching fairly nearby, but apparently they made no effort to contact him, and he may not have been aware of their presence. In contrast, when William preached in Brookfield, Missouri, two months earlier, he apparently visited the family of his daughter, Mary Jane, who had died in late December 1878, at age forty-four like her mother, leaving her husband, Andrew Scott, and their four children ranging in age from twenty-five to ten. Smith was apparently a welcome visitor as he comforted the grieving family. Mary Jane's death must have brought painful memories of Caroline's lingering death after several years of suffering. Her obituary noted somberly: "Medical skill and remedies were as naught to her, beyond temporary alleviation of her suffering,"<sup>96</sup> which had certainly been the case with her mother. Caroline, William and Caroline's second daughter, had died the previous year in Texas.<sup>97</sup> After this point, however, the documentary record does not show that William had continuing contact with his grandchildren.

Smith might have extended his mission, but Eliza wrote in May, summoning him home "with pressing calls for my attention to affairs there."<sup>98</sup> He made a circuitous route home, delivering several sermons in St. Louis and preaching in some of the same cities along the Mississippi River, not reaching Elkader until mid-June 1879. He obvi-

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<sup>96</sup>William had two daughters by his first wife Caroline, and the eldest, Mary Jane, lived with her husband and children at Brookfield, Missouri, during the decade of the 1870s. Mary Jane had died of "dropsy of the heart" (edema) just a month earlier, on December 21, 1878. Her husband, Andrew, was president of a bank in the city. The couple had four children: Alice, Mary ("Nettie"), Caroline ("Carrie"), and Frank. "Laid to Rest," *Brookfield Gazette* 12, no. 36 (December 26, 1878): 3; Harry D. Galley, *Joseph Smith Senior's Children* (Rock Island, Ill.: Author, 2000), 31-34.

<sup>97</sup>Galley, *Joseph Smith Senior's Children*, 34-35.

<sup>98</sup>William B. Smith (Hannibal, Mo.) to Brethren of the Herald, May

ously found the mission experience rewarding and wrote Joseph III of his intention to serve another mission “as soon as I get affairs in a proper condition at home.”<sup>99</sup> In the years that followed, Smith served numerous short missions throughout Iowa and adjoining states—typically lasting a month or a few weeks, but occasionally going as far afield as Illinois, Minnesota, and even Ohio and Michigan.

Joseph III, who must have had some misgivings about William as a missionary, was pleased and relieved by William’s success and generously praised him. Wherever he went, Joseph wrote in February 1879, he heard Saints say, “God Bless Bro. William,” and “He has done us good.” The Church president reported with approbation: “Your testimony is carrying weight with it, and the fact of your preaching the gospel, in its primitive charter, tells like golden measures for the church.”<sup>100</sup>

Through his missionary service, William solidified his place within the movement, yet his labors were not entirely free of controversy. Members in at least one locale complained that he collected funds and encouraged gifts for himself and his family. He had long engaged in this practice during his earlier missionary travels when the Mormon elders depended on members and other hospitable people for food and lodging. William did not see such personal fund-raising as incompatible with his calling and appointment as a missionary. RLDS members were quick to feed and house traveling missionaries and occasionally contributed cash to assist with traveling expenses, but they were far from wealthy. William’s approach was apparently unorthodox for RLDS itinerant preachers, who “were required to be self-sustaining and simultaneously provide for their own families.”<sup>101</sup>

William made no attempt to conceal his receipt of money and other gifts in his letters to the *Saints’ Herald* and to Joseph III. “I could not close this epistle with a justified conscience without comment or

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26, 1879, *Saints’ Herald* 26, no. 12 (June 15, 1879): 189.

<sup>99</sup>Wm. B. Smith to Dear Nephew, May 28, 1879.

<sup>100</sup>Joseph Smith III, Letter to William B. Smith, February 20, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbooks, Book 2, P6, 115–16, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

<sup>101</sup>Ronald E. Romig, “Alexander H. Smith: Remembering a Son of Joseph and Emma Smith,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 34.

compliment to the kind Saints of Keokuk,” William wrote in one letter to Joseph III, “for they responded cheerfully in assisting me on my journey.”<sup>102</sup> In another letter to the *Saints’ Herald*, William noted the “kindness shown me at Renick, Randolph county, Missouri.” He praised “the generous and thoughtful kindness of the sisters in that branch of the Church who remembered my wife and family with several good presents that will make their hearts glad.”<sup>103</sup> He obviously expected such support from members during his travels but, learning that there had been complaints, apologized to Joseph III, citing poverty as his justification: “As I had been from home on a mission, in northwest Missouri, some five months, and the time drew nigh for my return home; and as I had exhausted nearly the last dollar in expenses coming down from Far West I did not think it improper to speak of this subject before the Saints, asking them to assist me in my expenses to my home. If this is my offending,” William humbly offered, “I will say to the Saints . . . that if I ever come that way again, that I will try to do better next time, and say nothing about money.”<sup>104</sup> His apology apparently rectified the situation, as the documentary record shows no further complaints from the Church members about William’s expectations.

Despite his missionary success, William obviously desired reinstatement as Church patriarch, an office Joseph III was clearly unwilling to grant him. Within months, William began suspecting that his former followers were weakening his influence with his nephew. He wrote to Joseph on the topic apparently in early February, while he was only a few weeks into his mission. This letter has not survived, but Joseph’s answer, written on February 20, 1879, communicates William’s sensitive self-concept and his near-reflex of blaming others when matters did not go his way. Joseph III responded: “So far as the patriarchy of the church is concerned there will probably be but one opinion concerning where it goes, when the question is brought up before the church—I believe that opinion to be in your favor.” Still, Joseph III downplayed both its necessity and authority, putting William off with the mild assurance that it would, “at a propitious time . . . be

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<sup>102</sup>William Smith to Joseph, Dear Nephew, January 25, 1879

<sup>103</sup>William B. Smith to Brethren of the *Herald*, May 26, 1879.

<sup>104</sup>William B. Smith (Elkader, Iowa), Letter to Joseph [Smith III], Dear Nephew, April 4, 1880, *Saints’ Herald* 27, no. 10 (May 15, 1880): 158–59.

presented and disposed of."<sup>105</sup>

But without absolutely foreclosing the option, Joseph III also took no action to appoint William to that office. William blamed the enmity of Zenas Gurley and Jason Briggs, even though he had no direct evidence that they had been poisoning Joseph III's well where he was concerned, and Joseph reassured William: "You do Jason W. Briggs and Zenos H. Gurley Sr. a[n] injustice wherever you think to say either of these brethren ever attempted, in any wise[, to] lessen your influence with me, or to belittle your work at any time to me," Joseph responded to what was obviously at least a second letter with some exasperation in May 1879. "I have tried several time[s] to make you comprehend this. Such language as you use in your last letter respecting him [Briggs], are quite inconsistant [with] anything ever said by him to me of you."<sup>106</sup> William had apparently attacked Briggs and Gurley, but Joseph had rejected this effort to alienate Joseph from the two stalwarts and bluntly counseled William to share his opinions about past events in a manner "so as to not bring about personal conflict. . . . It is calling names and charging bad motives that hurt people."<sup>107</sup>

William's ability to tactfully resolve conflict had never been well-honed, and his impetuosity and insecurities were just as palpable in his writings to his nephew as they had been in his interpersonal interactions. After calming William's misgivings about his reputation, Joseph III, whose social skills were much better developed, often complimented his uncle on the positive impact he was having on the Church and assured him of his personal friendship. This approach typically pacified William, if only temporarily. For example, in that same May letter, Joseph concluded with compliments and blessings: "You are a tower of strength to the church, so long waiting for something humble to lean upon stronger than themselves; and that your declining years may shine like the sun in resplendent glory . . . is the

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<sup>105</sup>Joseph Smith III to William B. Smith, February 20, 1879.

<sup>106</sup>Joseph Smith III, Letter to William Smith, May 6, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbooks, Book 2, P6, 163–65, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

<sup>107</sup>Joseph Smith III, Letter to William Smith, July 12, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbooks, Letterbook 2, P6, 257–58, Community of Christ Library-Archives.



prayer of your nephew, ‘Little Joseph.’”<sup>108</sup>

However, some RLDS leaders indeed had concerns about William’s aspiration for the patriarchal office, especially when he began to publish his arguments in the *Saints’ Herald* that such an appointment was necessary. Joseph III, as editor, seems to have been remarkably willing to let William make his case public; but those who had been involved with William during the late 1840s and 1850s could not have expected William’s reputation to escape unscathed from all that had transpired during the collapse of his own Church. “William accepted his work as a missionary with vigor,” described historian Paul M. Edwards of William’s ambition, “but nothing about his demeanor suggested that he was giving up his desire to be recognized as the patriarch.” Rather, he brought up the need for appointment to that office “wherever he went,” although, as far as is known, he never took the step of bestowing patriarchal blessings on the members. Clearly, he felt the need for authorization and formal recognition of his position. “There was concern among Church leaders about William’s determination to affirm the office itself,” continued Edwards. “In March 1881, Jason Briggs wrote sardonically to fellow apostle and bishop William Kelly: ‘What do you think of the pipe laying to spring a patriarch upon us? And what a specimen.’ Further, Briggs called the office a ‘wart on the ecclesiastical tree, unknown in the Bible, or Book of Mormon,’ while expressing a desire to eradicate it.”<sup>109</sup> Whatever discussions there may have been between the Church president and his colleagues about the office of patriarch, Joseph III chose to look forward and not backward.

William was especially sensitive to references to himself and his church organization (and dissolution), when his former followers began publishing vignettes about the early history of the RLDS Church. He took particular exception to the writings of Zenas H. Gurley and W. W. Blair, probably because they neglected his own efforts.<sup>110</sup> This restraint doubtless had Joseph’s approval since he knew that, if William’s past was brought into the open, it could lead to conflict for the Reorganization. Writing to William, Joseph III assured William that

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid. For an additional example, see Joseph Smith III to William B. Smith, February 20, 1879.

<sup>109</sup>Briggs, qtd. in Edwards, “William B. Smith,” 134.

<sup>110</sup>Which specific works roused his ire is not clear, possibly editorials or letters in the *Saints’ Herald*.



*Joseph Smith III. Photo courtesy of Mary Dennis.*

he had spoken with Blair about a particular historical publication and assured him that Blair “takes out allusions to you where he can do so with propriety, in order not to annoy you; and we have talked the matter over.” But he also warned William, “Your acts in the past will . . . hardly be called into question, unless it be because of your own indiscretion in urging it on.”<sup>111</sup>

Joseph III further cautioned William about his interactions both with members and nonmembers over disagreements. When William mentioned to Joseph III in a letter that has not survived that he contemplated visiting David Whitmer, Joseph responded on May 6, counseling William against a combative approach. “I believe that David Whitmer may be met, much better by fair argument than denunciation,” wrote his nephew. He further counseled his uncle, “Let me entreat [you] to deal gently with erring ones.”<sup>112</sup> Joseph III was perceptive regarding William’s personality; and if William had adopted his nephew’s prudent counsel and moderate approach, it would have

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<sup>111</sup>Joseph Smith III to William Smith, July 12, 1879.

<sup>112</sup>Joseph Smith III to William Smith, May 6, 1879. I have been unable to locate any evidence that William ever met with Whitmer during his

greatly improved his relationships.

Joseph III's tactic in dealing with William was to encourage him to let "bygones to be bygones" and to leave behind "the past, the erroneous past." In a letter on May 15, 1879, he counseled: "True, many things of the past were good and right . . . but [even] the sifting out of these good things causes so much irritating dust and ashes of bad thing[s] to rise, that I think it better to let the sifting alone when it can be done safely."<sup>113</sup> Although he did not specifically allude to polygamy, it was clearly on his mind; and he often cautioned William about what he *should* remember. This was most evident when William was writing *William Smith on Mormonism* (1883). Joseph III wrote bluntly to William:

I have long been engaged in removing from Father's memory and from the early church, the stigma and blame thrown upon them because of Polygamy; and have at last lived to see the cloud rapidly lifting. And I would not consent to see further blame attached, by a blunder now. Therefore, uncle, bear in mind our standing to-day before the world, as defenders of Mormonism free from Polygamy, and go ahead with your personal recollections of Joseph and Hyrum. . . . And if you are the wise man I think you to be, you will fail [to] remember anything contrary to the lofty standard of character at which we esteem these good men. You can do the cause great good; you can injure it by injudicious sayings.<sup>114</sup>

William got the message, and failed to "remember" anything in his 1883 publication that would reflect poorly on the image of Joseph Smith Jr. and RLDS Church.<sup>115</sup>

William and his sister Katharine both proved to be loyal assets to the Reorganization in their final years. Joseph III and other RLDS leaders requested sworn statements on at least one occasion from both that would distance their Church from polygamy and the Nauvoo endowment—items of controversial doctrinal divergence from

mission to Missouri.

<sup>113</sup>Joseph Smith III, Letter to William Smith, May 15, 1879, Joseph Smith III Letterbooks, Letterbook 2, P6, 203A-204, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

<sup>114</sup>Joseph Smith III, Letter to William Smith, March 11, 1882, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

<sup>115</sup>William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883).

the Mormon Church headquartered in Salt Lake City. For example, in 1883, Joseph III specifically and pointedly asked: “Was the so called Revelation on Plural marriage the Polygamic Revelation ever presented to the twelve before or since [Joseph Smith’s] death to your knowledge if so state the date and time when such Revelation was presented and by whom[?]” William responded in a sworn statement, “No mention was made to me of any Plural marriage Revelation by any one nor did I ever see the said Revelation not until within the last 2 years some one having sent it to me by mail.”<sup>116</sup> On one occasion, just after giving his nephew a statement denying polygamy, William assured Joseph III, “What I have stated I am willing to qualify under oath & could say much more if needed.”<sup>117</sup>

Thus, William acted as a ready witness and made numerous denials of polygamy during his fifteen-year association with the RLDS Church, either at his nephew’s request or at his own volition. He was, however, misrepresenting the facts. Joseph Jr. dictated the revelation that is now LDS Doctrine and Covenants 132 on July 12, 1843, and Hyrum Smith read it to the Nauvoo High Council on August 12, exactly a month later.<sup>118</sup> William had probably been sealed to his first plural wife, an English convert named Mary Ann Covington, by Brigham Young in April 1843.<sup>119</sup> The ensuing summer William was in the East. However, in April and May 1844, William had led a group of forty or fifty Saints to Nauvoo, arriving on April 22 aboard the steamboat *Charlotte*. During his brief stay in Nauvoo, he was inducted into the Council of Fifty. On Sunday, May 12, he was endowed, initiated into the Quorum of the Anointed, and joined in the group prayer “for deliverance from our enemies and exaltation to such officers as will

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<sup>116</sup>William Smith sworn statement, October 22, 1883, Clayton County, Iowa, before T. G. Price, Notary Public; published as, “The ‘Endowment’: Statement of William B. Smith, The Only Surviving Brother of the Seer,” *Saints’ Advocate* (Plano, Ill.) 2, no. 6 (December 1879): 65.

<sup>117</sup>William B. Smith, Letter to Joseph Smith III, October 19, 1883, Miscellaneous Letters and Papers, P13, f2311, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

<sup>118</sup>See discussion in Brian C. Hales, *Joseph Smith and Polygamy*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), chap. 28.

<sup>119</sup>Testimony of Mary Ann [Covington] West, in *Temple Lot Case*, 380–82.

enable the Servants of God to execute Righteousness in the Earth.”<sup>120</sup> On May 21, William left Nauvoo in company with Heber C. Kimball, Brigham Young, and other missionaries who were campaigning for Joseph as a candidate for the U.S. presidency. When he returned in 1845, almost a year after the murders of Joseph and Hyrum, he married Mary Jane Rollins (monogamously) a month after Caroline’s death but was sealed polygamously to Mary Jones, Priscilla Mogridge, Henriette Rice, Sarah Libby, and Hannah Libby, none of whom stayed with him or apparently considered themselves his wives by the time he married Roxey Ann Grant.<sup>121</sup>

Katharine also firmly denied polygamy: “I was at his [Joseph Smith’s] house many times, and I conversed with him about many subjects, but I never heard him at any time mention such a thing as the plural-wife system or order. And I heard nothing of such a doctrine existing until a year after his death. At that time, on coming to Nauvoo, I was informed that Brigham Young and others were practicing that system.”<sup>122</sup> It seems likely that she genuinely did not know about plural marriage or of the Nauvoo endowment. During the first half of the 1840s, she and her family of numerous children lived in Plymouth, Illinois, some forty miles from Nauvoo. Joseph Smith visited her at least once,<sup>123</sup> but she could seldom come to Nauvoo. Thus, she could truthfully state that she had no knowledge of the temple rites performed in Nauvoo because she never received them and apparently was unaware of Joseph and Hyrum’s participation in polyg-

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<sup>120</sup>Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet’s Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 478; Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970), 223.

<sup>121</sup>Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 875; George D. Smith, *Nauvoo Polygamy: “. . . but we called it celestial marriage”* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2008), 623–24.

<sup>122</sup>“Aunt Katharine Salisbury’s Testimony,” *Saints’ Herald* 40, no. 18 (May 6, 1893): 275; also published in *History of the RLDS Church*, 5:207.

<sup>123</sup>This visit took place on January 9, 1843, when Joseph Smith and his entourage were returning from his trial at Springfield, Illinois. Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, Richard Lloyd Anderson, eds., *Journals, Volume 2: December 1841–April 1843* in the Journal Series of the JOSEPH SMITH PAPERS (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 242–43.



*Katharine Smith Salisbury with RLDS Church leaders, taken at Burlington, Iowa, 1896. Both Katharine and William were viewed as living links between Joseph Jr.'s original church and the RLDS Church and often shared their recollections. Seated, second from left, is Alexander Hale Smith, Joseph and Emma's son, with Katharine on his left. Photo courtesy of Mary Dennis.*

amy. William knew about both because he had been present and a participant. Despite his certain knowledge, he was still willing to give testimony to the contrary if it meant undermining Mormonism in the West. This attitude, which at least technically amounts to perjury, was, he felt, justified, both as retaliation against Brigham Young and the Twelve for rejecting him and as a worthy means of building up his nephew's church.

When leaders of the LDS Church in the West learned of William's statements they were surprised. After William's nephew Joseph F. Smith, then an apostle, read one of William's statements denying polygamy, he wrote to his uncle in 1884 asking him to "reconcile some things you have said with your career in Nauvoo, and your connection with Sarah and Hannah Libby, Priscilla Morgridge & others?" He reminded William that "some of these women are [still] living and can speak for themselves."<sup>124</sup> William did not respond.

In the final decade of his life, William continued to serve a number of brief missions for the RLDS Church and presided at various

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<sup>124</sup>Joseph F. Smith (Salt Lake City), Letter to William Smith, July 12,

worship meetings and conferences in northeastern Iowa. When his health allowed, Smith enjoyed traveling to the annual April conferences of the RLDS Church. He also participated in other notable Church events, such as the dedication of a chapel at Montrose, Iowa, on September 2, 1883.<sup>125</sup> After thirty-two years of marriage, Eliza passed away in 1889, and William married Rosa Jewitt Surprise, an RLDS Church member who attended the Clinton, Iowa Branch, in December of that same year. The couple moved approximately fifteen miles southeast, settling in Osterdock, Iowa, where William and Eliza's youngest daughter Loie Mae lived. In his final years, he was instrumental in organizing a branch of the RLDS Church in Osterdock. At its organizational meeting, William was unanimously chosen as branch president. In addition to presiding at meetings, he occasionally preached in a local church or in his own home to a small group of RLDS followers, which included members of his growing posterity.<sup>126</sup>

The pinnacle of William's experience with the RLDS Church came in 1883, when the Church planned its annual April conference to be held in Kirtland rather than the usual location of Lamoni, Iowa, where Joseph III had established the Church's headquarters in 1881. Having assisted in the construction of the Kirtland Temple, William was delighted to be involved in such a significant reunion. Like his missionary travels through Missouri in 1879, his presence at the conference triggered reflections on this earlier period of his turbulent life. It was gratifying to have attention showered upon him because of his connection to the Joseph Smith and to the temple dedication almost fifty years earlier. Joseph III recalled kindly that William's "tall form was conspicuous and added dignity to the assembly." William fully enjoyed the honor of sitting in the tiered priesthood pulpits that

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1884, MS 1325, Box 31, fd. 3, pp. 58–67, LDS Church History Library. Joseph F. Smith was responding to a letter that William had written on June 25, 1884, that apparently has not survived. The women Joseph F. names had been sealed to William as plural wives between September 1844 and August 1845.

<sup>125</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 206; *History of the RLDS Church*, 4:433.

<sup>126</sup>Osterdock Branch Minutebook, Book 1 (small), entry for June 11, 1893; see also Osterdock Branch Minutebook, Book 2 (large), entry for August 19, 1893, both in Community of Christ Library-Archives.



*Illustration from an 1883 issue of Harper's Weekly of RLDS members gathering at the Kirtland Temple for a session of general conference.*

rose prominently on each end of the spacious assembly room.<sup>127</sup>

William was further recognized during the week-long conference. He offered the opening prayer at one session, preached several sermons, and was appointed to preside at another session.<sup>128</sup> Reorganized Saints also requested that William relate his reminiscences of early Mormon events, including the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. He was happy to comply, and Saints and newspaper reporters listened eagerly to William's firsthand recollections of Mormonism's earliest events. It was a captivating portrayal of a cherished Mormon narrative. After recounting his brother's quest for truth and the impact of his revelatory experiences on his family, William reaffirmed his belief in his brother's prophetic mission—something he had done

<sup>127</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 184–85, 207.

<sup>128</sup>“General Conference,” *Saints' Herald* 30, no. 16 (April 21, 1883): 242–43. See also Kevin Bryant, “‘Attracting No Little Attention’: The RLDS Return to Kirtland, 1883 General Conference,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 29 (2009): 59–60, 71.



repeatedly. His remarks were published in their entirety in the *Saints' Herald*.<sup>129</sup> A reporter from the *Cleveland Herald* asked about William's involvement in the construction of the temple fifty years earlier. William described carrying "the stone and mortar that put these walls together." When the reporter asked how he liked the conference, William enthusiastically quipped: "Just as well as it is possible for anyone to do. I shouldn't want to enjoy it any better for fear I might evaporate." He concluded the interview by describing what "a great pleasure" it was for him "to again enter the blessed old building." The reporter described Smith as "a tall, spare gentleman, seventy-two years of age, and is apparently as deeply in love with the Church and cause as was his brother."<sup>130</sup>

The conference experience was deeply satisfying to William. He was gratified by the attention he received during the proceedings and by the eagerness with which those present listened to his account of building up Mormonism, his personal sacrifices, and the expression of his faith. The Saints admired him as a tangible link between their organization and the earliest days of the Church. Before leaving Kirtland, Joseph Smith III asked William if he were enjoying himself. William straightened up and, with a twinkle in his eye, replied, "Enjoying myself? Why, I couldn't possibly enjoy myself more unless I were *bigger*—and even that is a little doubtful!"<sup>131</sup>

William's response revealed his contentment, but such moments of satisfaction were fleeting. He had primarily held himself aloof during the eighteen years between the RLDS Church's organization in 1860 and his formal acceptance of membership and priesthood in 1878. Although he proved himself an energetic missionary and basked in the attention he received, the other titles he coveted eluded him.

William's insatiable desire for higher office was evident in the letters he wrote toward the end of his life, evincing his continuing insecurities. At one point in March or April of 1882 when he was turning seventy-one, William argued in a letter to the *Saints' Herald* that the Church's hierarchy was incomplete without a patriarch: "If the

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<sup>129</sup>"William B. Smith: Experience and Testimony," *Saints' Herald* 30, no. 24 (June 16, 1883): 388.

<sup>130</sup>*Cleveland Herald* report reproduced in "General Conference," 242.

<sup>131</sup>Howard, *Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III*, 185, 207.

keys of revelation given to Joseph Smith are to be held by a successor, why are not the keys of the patriachate given to Hiram [sic] Smith to be held by his, or a successor in office, also upon the same principle?”<sup>132</sup> The *Saints’ Herald*, still being edited by Joseph III, published this public and pointed hint that he should be appointed to that office. However, Joseph continued to delay, never completely ruling out the possibility and thereby keeping William hoping for an eventually positive decision. Just a year before William’s death, he made the same argument to RLDS Apostle William H. Kelley. “My nephew is lame on Some of these points,” he confided to Kelly, whom he hoped to make his advocate. “The Church under him not yet perfect in its organization.”<sup>133</sup>

Joseph’s caution was not harsh or punitive, and the two appear to have enjoyed an amicable relationship, both on paper and in person. Joseph simply had an organizational astuteness and managerial ability that William himself lacked. He obviously agreed that organizational completeness required a patriarch—just that it could not be William. After William’s death in 1893, Joseph waited a respectable six years, then appointed his brother Alexander Hale Smith to two positions which were sustained by conference action: as a counselor in the First Presidency (1897–1902) and also as the RLDS Church’s first Patriarch/Evangelist.<sup>134</sup>

Joseph had judiciously outwaited William. A “yes” would have brought an unstable person into the inner organizational circle that was dealing with other problems. A flat “no” would have outraged William and probably sent him on a rampage of retaliation, protest, and complaints to anyone who would listen, creating a dangerous source of divisiveness and possibly triggering revelations about matters he had agreed to “forget.” If William had still been alive when Joseph III appointed Alexander, he would have felt equally injured. His contributions were undeniable—but so were his weaknesses.

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<sup>132</sup>William B. Smith, Letter to the *Saints’ Herald*, ca. March/April 1882, *Saints’ Herald* 29, no. 8 (April 15, 1882): 119–20.

<sup>133</sup>William Smith (Osterdock, Iowa), Letter to William H. Kelley, October 7, 1892, Community of Christ Library-Archives.

<sup>134</sup>Alexander H. Smith Letter Book, 1897–1901, MS 17756, LDS Church History Library; Ronald E. Romig, ed., *Alexander: Joseph and Emma Smith’s Far West Son* (Independence: John Whitmer Books, 2010), 110–11.

Joseph's delicate balance managed to accomplish something that Joseph Smith Jr., Brigham Young, and James J. Strang had not. He wisely checked his uncle's aspirations but often published his letters, a favor that William relished. In his private correspondence, Joseph III also showered his uncle with praise, admiration, and affection. Joseph's success in handling his unpredictable uncle was a remarkable achievement, as he provided his aspiring relative just enough of a role to retain his loyalty, while never granting him any real governing authority in the Church. It probably also helped that William never resided near the headquarters of the RLDS Church, limiting his in-person interactions to the occasional conference. As a result, William served faithfully in the Reorganization during the final fifteen years of his life.

On the other hand, Joseph III unquestionably employed William to meet his own ends. He solicited statements from him that supported the historical narrative Joseph was creating about the Restoration, while keeping him at arm's length from what William really wanted. After William's death, Joseph III and future RLDS historians minimized his role and influence on their organization. William's obituary as published in the *Saints' Herald* was noticeably short, abbreviated his many contributions during Joseph Jr.'s lifetime, minimized his role in keeping alive the concept of lineal succession, and downplayed his multiple missions during his last fifteen years.<sup>135</sup> Ironically, it was the LDS Church, from which William had long been estranged, that published a lengthier obituary.<sup>136</sup>

In his testimony during the Temple Lot Case, William asserted that while "I was living in Lee County, Illinois. . . . I had a following of about thirty members at that place. I became identified with the Reorganized Church about sixteen years ago. . . . The following I had, I turned them over, as far as I was concerned, into the hands of my nephew."<sup>137</sup> It was easier for him to believe that narrative than the truth—which was that they had rejected his leadership. There is no evidence that he ever understood that he, himself, had scuttled his own organization through his overweening pride and overconfident assumption that his charisma would overcome all doctrinal objections. Perhaps that was an admission he could not make, even silently. Still,

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<sup>135</sup>"Died. Smith," *Saints' Herald* 40, no. 49 (December 9, 1893): 787.

<sup>136</sup>"William B. Smith," *Deseret Evening News*, December 19, 1893, 4.

<sup>137</sup>William B. Smith, Testimony, in *The Temple Lot Case*, 93.

William had in truth performed a indispensable role in keeping alive the concept of lineal succession, and the Reorganized Church ultimately provided him with a theology and structure where he had a place—one that still brought him a measure of attention and respect.

# THE 1855 MURDER OF ISAAC WHITEHOUSE IN PAROWAN, UTAH

*Connell O'Donovan*

OUTSIDE THE TOWN WALLS of the new Mormon settlement of Parowan, Utah, the settlers had built an extensive network of irrigation ditches to carry precious water from the nearby canyon creeks to their fields. On October 29, 1855, one of the residents of the small town noticed something odd about freshly disturbed earth in one of the many irrigation ditches. Investigating further, she or he was horrified to discover a shallowly buried body at the bottom of the ditch. Others were called to help; and they dug up the small corpse of a young boy, which they carried into the new log council house in town. They sent for the town's Justice of the

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Peace, Herman D. Bayles, to conduct an inquest. Bayles asked that Calvin C. Pendleton participate in the post-mortem investigation.<sup>1</sup> Pendleton, a gunsmith, had recently been elected county recorder for Iron County and been called as first counselor in the Parowan Ward bishopric.<sup>2</sup> He also had some medical training, and the locals sometimes referred to him as Dr. Pendleton since he performed basic medical care, such as setting broken bones.<sup>3</sup>

There was no difficulty in identifying the corpse as that of eleven-year-old Isaac Whitehead. To the horror of those attending the inquest, the little boy was wearing filthy clothing and was covered in his own excrement. His hands and ankles were chafed, showing that they had been bound tightly by rope. His body was covered with large bruises where he had been kicked and hit repeatedly; and his skin was “badly abraded and broken,” according to James H. Martineau, a witness at the inquest.<sup>4</sup> Martineau had recently been called as first counselor in the LDS Parowan Stake presidency. His extensive journal provides an invaluable record of early Mormon colonizing efforts in southern Utah during the 1850s.

The evidence continued to pile up of prolonged and extensive physical abuse. Martineau thought the boy had been “partly chilled and partly drowned” in the water of the irrigation ditch and then buried in it after the water subsided. Adding to the horror, Isaac had been deaf and was also considered “dumb” by the community—not for lack of intelligence, but for his inability to communicate by articulate speech. The fact that the child had died, unable to call for help, was a final, sickening detail.

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<sup>1</sup>Calvin C. Pendleton, Letter to George A. Smith, January 9, 1856, 2, George A. Smith Papers, 1834–77, MS 1322, Box 5, fd. 11, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>2</sup>Donald G. Godfrey and Rebecca S. Martineau-McCarty, eds., *An Uncommon Common Pioneer: The Journals of James Henry Martineau* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2008), August 8 and September 9, 1855, 80–82.

<sup>3</sup>Janet Burton Seegmiller, *A History of Iron County: Community above Self* (Salt Lake City: Utah Historical Society, 1998), 222–23.

<sup>4</sup>Godfrey and Martineau-McCarty, *An Uncommon Common Pioneer*, October 29, 1855, 85.

Isaac Whitehouse had been orphaned during his family's trip across the plains in 1854. He also had a brother, Joseph Hyrum Whitehouse, born in 1851, who likely had also died sometime during the journey. Isaac was left to the care of Elizabeth Ward, his mother's sister. Elizabeth had converted to Mormonism in England and joined the Whitehouses on their long pilgrimage to Utah. On the voyage, Elizabeth Ward met fellow converts Samuel George Baker and his wife Sarah Green Baker, the parents of young son named Edwin George Baker. Elizabeth, who reached Utah with Isaac in tow, apparently married Samuel George Baker in 1855 as his second wife, although it appears that initially it was only for "time"; their "sealing for eternity" would come a year later.<sup>5</sup>

Baker's first wife, Sarah Green, appears on the passenger list of the *Windermere* in 1854 and apparently arrived alive in New Orleans on April 23, 1854. Then she disappears from the documentary record. She, too, likely died while crossing the plains since no known document places her in Utah territory.

#### ISAAC WHITEHOUSE

Isaac Whitehouse was born in 1845 in Watford, Northamptonshire, England, the first child of Jacob Whitehouse and Rebecca Ward Whitehouse, married in 1844.<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Ward had been born in Long Buckby, Northamptonshire, on April 2, 1823, the oldest child of John Ward and Elizabeth Slater Ward. Their second child was Elizabeth Ward, in whose care Isaac was left while crossing the plains and who would marry Samuel G. Baker in Utah, as his second wife. She was born

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<sup>5</sup>This speculation comes from the fact that Samuel G. Baker and Elizabeth Ward were sealed as husband and wife in 1856, as noted below. However, one document from 1855 already calls Isaac's aunt, Elizabeth Ward, "Mrs. Baker." Ergo, either the 1856 sealing date is inaccurate, or there was an earlier "time only" marriage followed by an 1856 "time and eternity" sealing. *Ibid.*, October 29, 1855, 85.

<sup>6</sup>Isaac Whitehouse was christened on December 14, 1845. Bishop's transcripts, Watford, Northamptonshire: 1701–1872, Church of England, LDS Family History Library, film no. 1999992, item 3; and *England and Wales Marriage Registration Index, 1837–1920*, Jacob Whitehouse marriage to Rebecca Ward, 1844, Daventry, Northamptonshire, 15:511, Family Search.org (accessed February 2014).

March 17, 1826, in Tipton, Staffordshire, England.<sup>7</sup> Jacob and Rebecca apparently converted to Mormonism between the births of their first son, Isaac, in 1845 and their second son, Joseph Hyrum, whose name reflects their new religious allegiance, in March 1851. Four days after Joseph's birth, the family was enumerated in the census taken on April 1, 1851. They were then living in Watford, Northamptonshire. Also residing with the family was Rebecca's younger sister, twenty-five-year-old Elizabeth Ward, who was employed as a dressmaker.<sup>8</sup>

Like all British Mormons, the Whitehouses embraced the missionary message that they must leave Babylon behind and gather with the Saints in their desert Zion to create the kingdom of God on earth. To remain faithful in their beliefs, they could not remain in their homeland. While certainly among the lower classes, Jacob Whitehouse, a shoemaker, made a better living than many, and the family was able to save 40 pounds to help pay for their long, arduous journey. In February 1854, Jacob, Rebecca, sister Elizabeth, and the two sons went to Liverpool and, after a week's preparation there, sailed for America on board the *Windermere* with some 470 other Mormons under the charge of Elder Daniel Garn. During the long sea voyage, the ship encountered five weeks of contrary winds and heavy gales. Smallpox broke out among those on board, afflicting thirty-nine and killing ten. (It is possible that one of those who died was Isaac's younger brother Joseph.)

The Whitehouse-Ward family arrived in New Orleans on April 23, 1854, despite a renewal of the smallpox epidemic that raged on board, killing seven Mormons. After being quarantined on an island for three days, those not showing signs of the illness continued by taking the steamboat *Grand Tower* upriver to St. Louis where a cholera outbreak claimed many more lives when the steerage passengers were again quarantined and exposed to that deadly disease.<sup>9</sup> Most survivors then went on to Kansas City, Missouri, aboard the steamship

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<sup>7</sup>Elizabeth Ward, Patriarchal Blessing, February 5, 1855, Index to Patriarchal Blessings, 1833–1963, LDS Family History Library, film 392692, 35:506.

<sup>8</sup>England Census, 1851, Watford Locks, Watford, Northamptonshire, ED 6, Folio 694, p. 21, Ancestry.com (accessed January 2014).

<sup>9</sup>Fortunately the city of St. Louis kept very good death records at this time, carefully recording the massive number of cholera deaths there in



*Sonorra*. They likely started at Atchison, Kansas, for Utah Territory in the Daniel Garn company which left Missouri on July 1 with 477 people (mostly passengers from the *Windermere*) and some 45 wagons. Unfortunately, the names of fewer than ninety of those 477 pioneers are documented as being in the Garn company.

Both of Isaac's parents apparently died sometime after arriving in New Orleans but before arriving in Utah, leaving the nine-year-old deaf boy in the care of his aunt, Elizabeth Ward. These deaths must have been especially anguishing for the deaf boy who had almost no way of expressing his feelings to others about burying his parents along the trail, never to see them or their graves again.

### SAMUEL GEORGE BAKER

At some point during the long journey to Utah, Elizabeth Ward and Isaac Whitehouse met and apparently became friends with Samuel George Baker and his family. Samuel was born on July 23, 1830, in Hill Hook (Sutton-Coldfield), Warwickshire, England, the third child of Edward Baker and Harriet Williams Baker.<sup>10</sup> He had at least five (and possibly seven) siblings. By 1836 the Bakers had moved to nearby Birmingham, where Samuel's last three siblings were born. About 1849 he married Sarah Green, probably in Birmingham. A woman named Sarah Jane Green was born December 9, 1825, in Birmingham, but she may not have been Baker's wife. Sarah Jane Green was baptized a member of the LDS Church on September 9, 1850.<sup>11</sup> If they are the same individual, Sarah Green Baker was seven months pregnant at the time of her baptism.<sup>12</sup> (Samuel G. Baker's LDS baptismal date is unknown.) Their first and

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1854. Because its online index is not very complete or accurate, I carefully read through every page of the Registry of Deaths for the weeks that the Daniel Garn company was in the area. I found no listing for Bakers or Whitehouses. St. Louis City Registry of Deaths, Missouri Death Records: 1834–1910, 1854, Ancestry.com (accessed March 2014).

<sup>10</sup>Samuel George Baker, Patriarchal Blessing, February 5, 1855, Index to Patriarchal Blessings, 1833–1963, LDS Family History Library, film 392634, 35:507.

<sup>11</sup>Sarah Jane Green, ID No. KWJF-MRL, Familysearch.org/tree (accessed January 2014), gives the dates of her birth and LDS baptism.

<sup>12</sup>Circumstantially, all records support the idea that Sarah Jane

only child, Edwin George Baker, was born in Birmingham on November 20, 1850, and despite Sarah's recent conversion to Mormonism, was christened on December 1 at St. Chad's Cathedral. St. Chad's is a Roman Catholic church, so presumably the family was Catholic until their conversion to Mormonism.<sup>13</sup> The 1851 Census of St. George Parish, Birmingham, lists Samuel Baker, his wife, and their five-month-old son Edwin.<sup>14</sup> Samuel was a "pearl worker"—someone who shaped fancy buttons and beads out of iridescent mother-of-pearl from mollusks. They lived in Buck House with several other families on Farm Street. The 1854 roster for the *Windermere* confirms Baker's occupation as a pearl worker and gives their former address as 56 Vittoria St. in Birmingham. Even today, that area of Vittoria Street is still the center of the jewelry-making industry in Birmingham, with the Municipal School for Jewelers and Silversmiths just a few doors down from where Samuel Baker lived.

The Daniel Garn company arrived in Great Salt Lake City on October 1, 1854. Samuel and Sarah Baker (if she was still alive), their son Edwin, Elizabeth Ward, and her nephew Isaac apparently were sent that same fall to Parowan. Lacking clear documentation, I speculate that Elizabeth Ward married Samuel G. Baker as his second wife (first plural wife) sometime prior to February 1855. Possible support is the fact that Samuel G. Baker and Elizabeth Ward together visited

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Green was Mrs. Sarah Green Baker. When Samuel and Sarah Baker's first son was baptized at St. Chad's in Birmingham, England, she was referred to (in Latin) as "Sarae Green," confirming that her maiden name was Green. According to the 1851 Census of St. George Parish, Birmingham, England, Mrs. Sarah Baker was twenty-five (thus, had been born about 1826), born in Birmingham. Additionally, in the 1854 passenger list of the *Windermere*, Mrs. Sarah Baker was twenty-eight (again, born about 1826), and their last residence was 56 Vittoria Street in Birmingham. These details correspond to Sarah Jane Green's having been born on December 9, 1825, in Birmingham, and being baptized LDS in 1850.

<sup>13</sup>See baptism for "Georgius Edwinus Baker," son of "Samuelis Baker" and "Sarae Green" (Latin record), baptismal registers, 1847–54, St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, Warwickshire, England, LDS Family History Library film no. 1999521, item 1,742.

<sup>14</sup>England Census, 1851, St. George Parish, Birmingham, Warwickshire, District 27, Farm Street, Buck House, Folio 676, p. 23, Ancestry.com (accessed January 2014).

Parowan's stake patriarch, Elisha H. Groves, and received separate patriarchal blessings from him in the same visit, while there is no record of Sarah Green Baker ever having received such a blessing or even that she survived the westward trek.<sup>15</sup> Ward's blessing is under her maiden name, but it was fairly common for Mormon women—especially polygamous wives—to use their birth names in official documents. In addition, around March 1855, Elizabeth Ward Baker apparently conceived her first child by Samuel Baker, also suggesting an earlier marriage.

Colonizing southern Utah was a daunting and potentially fatal task. LDS apostle Parley P. Pratt had scouted lands south of the Salt Lake Valley in 1849 and found the area of what is now Parowan rich in water, timber, and iron (which gave the county its name). He camped there and erected a flagpole. Apostle George A. Smith followed with a party of settlers; and in December 1850, they founded Fort Louisa in honor of Louisa Beaman, the first woman whose sealing date to Joseph Smith is known (April 1841).<sup>16</sup> The following spring, more settlers arrived, including James H. Martineau; and on May 11, 1851, the new town's name was changed to "Parowan," a Ute word meaning "bad water" in reference to the nearby Little Salt Lake.<sup>17</sup> The bed of the nearly dried-up lake was solid salt blocks which the locals harvested to avoid importing expensive salt from Salt Lake City.<sup>18</sup>

In 1855 Iron County crops failed from disease and mass insect infestations; only three men in Parowan had a surplus of any wheat to survive the 1855–56 winter.<sup>19</sup> Jesse N. Smith, a counselor in the Parowan Stake presidency, reported that he lost all his crop "owing to the

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<sup>15</sup>Elizabeth Ward, Patriarchal Blessing, Index to Patriarchal Blessings: 1833–1963, February 5, 1855, 35:506; and Samuel George Baker, Patriarchal Blessing, *ibid.*, February 5, 1855, 35:507, film nos. 396634 and 392692 respectively. It was not unusual for married women, especially polygamists, to receive their blessings under their maiden names. Patriarch Groves (1797–1867) also served in the Utah Territorial Legislature.

<sup>16</sup>Godfrey and Martineau-McCarty, *An Uncommon Common Pioneer*, April 9, 1851, 9.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, May 11, 1851, 30.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, August 6, 1855, 80.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, October 9, 1854, 61; September 26, 1855, 83; October 25, 1855, 84; and December 20, 1855, 89.

ravages of grasshoppers,” which included five acres of fall wheat and twelve acres of spring crops. All he harvested that year were “a few potatoes planted about the middle of June [1855].”<sup>20</sup> Money was almost non-existent all over the territory, so goods and services were based on a barter system. Those with specialized skills like pearl-button-making found little demand for those skills in Parowan, and obviously Baker was untrained in any other occupation, including farming. As economic conditions territory-wide worsened, there was a “general suspension of [mercantile] business,” which affected the inhabitants of Salt Lake City harshly, but those in rural areas suffered even more intensely.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, Indians were a constant threat despite the Mormons’ befriending some of them and their local leaders. Driven from the best lands and water sources by the colonists and plagued by diseases brought by the white colonists, the indigenous peoples were also struggling on the edge of survival and resorted to raiding homes and gardens, to cattle rustling, and to direct violence.

If conforming to the new marital dynamics of polygamy was not difficult enough, early in the fall of 1855, leaders began pressuring the faithful to sign over everything they had to the Church with “deeds of Consecration.” Other Church/community obligations included donating labor to public works like making adobes, building and repairing fences and walls, and creating the irrigation infrastructures. In addition, Baker was in debt to the Church’s Perpetual Emigrating Fund. He had paid up front 24 pounds of the 30 pounds he owed, but he may have also assumed the debt still owed by Elizabeth Ward and young Isaac. He had to build a cabin for them, Sarah was pregnant, their son Edwin was only four, and nine-year-old deaf Isaac could not provide much assistance. I hypothesize that Samuel Baker, rather than rising above these burdens, succumbed to them, making Isaac literally the whipping boy for all his frustrations.

#### THE BAKERS’ TREATMENT OF ISAAC WHITEHOUSE

Almost as soon as the Bakers arrived in Parowan, word got around that Baker was mistreating Isaac Whitehouse. Calvin C. Pendleton admitted in a letter to George A. Smith that “soon after he

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<sup>20</sup>Jesse N. Smith, *Autobiography and Journal, 1855–1906*, 23, MS 1489, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>21</sup>“Hard Times,” *Deseret News*, January 16, 1856, 4.

came” to Parowan, Samuel Baker’s treatment of the deaf boy “was then considered improper and he was corrected, by the teachers being sent to inquire into the matter.”<sup>22</sup> Apparently, the teachers felt that Baker was sufficiently repentant. No follow-up visits were recorded.

Later in the summer of 1855, Pendleton witnessed the Whitehouse boy “a few times . . . at play in the streets with his comrad[e]s.” Pendleton thought he “appeared comfortable and happy.” But by mid-October things had radically changed for the boy. Pendleton again saw him walking along the street having just come inside the town from the very same field where he would later be buried. Pendleton noted that Whitehouse “was <not> well clothed as formerly, and his legs appear[ed] in an uncomfortable condition.” Pendleton asked a Brother Jones, who had come to Parowan with the Bakers, about Isaac. Jones informed him that “the filthyness of the boys habits, rendered it impossible to cloth[e] him in a common manner, or keep him in a comfortable condition.” However, it soon came to light that it was quite common knowledge among most of Parowan’s residents that Baker and “his wife” were again abusing the young boy. As Martineau described the events, “The testimony of the people revealed a long course of the most inhuman cruelty, perpetrated on the poor boy.” Several sources confirm the abuse, but only one source specifies that Isaac’s Aunt Elizabeth was Baker’s accomplice in the abuse. Martineau recorded that Whitehouse’s parents “dying while on their way here, left him to the care of Mrs. Baker, the sister of his mother.” Then, seeking an explanation for the barbarism, he added, “After she got him, she herself became a mother, and hated the boy most intensely, and incited Baker to his cruel deeds.”<sup>23</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that the abuse was instigated by Elizabeth and stemmed from her own pregnancy under the stress of pioneering a new community and suffering privation and at least hunger, if not malnutri-

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<sup>22</sup>Pendleton to George A. Smith, January 9, 1856, 1. These “teachers” held the lesser or Aaronic Priesthood and were charged “to watch over the church . . . and see that there is no iniquity in the church, neither hardness with each other, neither lying, backbiting, nor evil speaking . . . [and] to warn, expound, exhort, and teach, and invite all to come unto Christ” (D&C 20:53–59).

<sup>23</sup>Godfrey and Martineau-McCarty, *An Uncommon Common Pioneer*, October 29, 1855, 85.

tion. Modern medical research has found that up to 20 percent of women experience significant depression during pregnancy (not just postpartum depression).<sup>24</sup> Martineau's journal suggests that, while Mrs. Baker was principally the inciter, her new husband, Samuel G. Baker, was the principal perpetrator of the abuse. However, Mrs. Baker was also responsible for some of it as well.

The abuse of the young boy reached its climax on the night of Saturday, October 27, 1855. They bound the boy hand and foot, leaving him unable to run away, to call for help, or even to beg for mercy. Then his pregnant aunt and her husband mercilessly kicked and beat him to death. Samuel Baker dragged the dying boy, bruised and broken, covered in the filth of his own excrement, out to the fields and where he covered the body with the shallow dirt in the bottom of an irrigation ditch, the frosty soil being presumably too frozen for a deeper cache.

After the discovery of the boy's corpse, Justice of the Peace H. D. Bayles and local physician Calvin C. Pendleton made a physical examination on Monday, October 29. The Bakers were immediately found and brought to the inquest. At first "Baker denied all," but then Mrs. Baker confessed and even "got the cord with which he had been tied." Despite Mrs. Baker's quick confession, Samuel G. Baker remained "cool and defiant throughout." The inquest jury quickly rendered the verdict that Isaac Woodhouse "came to his death through the cruelty of Saml. G. Baker and his wife."

#### CONSEQUENCES: *PEOPLE v. SAMUEL G. BAKER*

On Tuesday, October 30, the Bakers "were cut off from the church for their crime" by the Parowan congregation's unanimous vote.<sup>25</sup> The Bakers then "tried to escape to California . . . but failed."<sup>26</sup> Apparently they were arrested then, for they were taken to Cedar City and on November 13 were examined by Justice Charles

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<sup>24</sup>See for example, "Psychiatric Disorders During Pregnancy," Reproductive Psychiatry Resource and Information Center, Massachusetts General Hospital, in <http://womensmentalhealth.org/specialty-clinics/psychiatric-disorders-during-pregnancy/> (accessed February 2014).

<sup>25</sup>Godfrey and Martineau-McCarty, *An Uncommon Common Pioneer*, October 30, 1855, 86.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, November 13, 1855, 87.

Hopkins. Matters moved to a formal trial. Jesse Nathaniel Smith, district attorney for the Third Judicial District and a member of the Parowan Stake presidency, “prosecuted Saml G. Baker before Justice Chas Hopkins of Cedar City Precinct.” Jesse N. Smith (1834–1906), the son of Silas Smith, Joseph Smith Sr.’s brother, was first cousin to both Joseph Smith Jr. and Apostle George A. Smith. When George A. was called to establish Parowan in 1851, Church leaders also assigned twenty-seven-year-old Jesse and his widowed mother, Mary Aikens Smith, to colonize there. In Jesse’s holograph autobiography, he noted that “Baker [was] accused of Causing the death of his nephew Isaac Whitehouse who was dumb and lived with Baker.” After the trial in Cedar City, “both Baker and his wife were bound over to appear and answer the Charge at the next term of the District Court” in Fillmore.<sup>27</sup>

Deputy U.S. Marshal Alexander Williams, who was headquartered at Fillmore (briefly the territorial capital), arrived in Cedar City on November 21 with a warrant to arrest Baker and subpoenas for witnesses like Martineau.<sup>28</sup> Six days later, the grand jury of the Second District Court at Fillmore presented an indictment against Baker for Whitehouse’s murder. Being subpoenaed was “much against my [Martineau’s] will,” probably because of the intense inconvenience involved. He left Parowan in the wintry cold of November 22, paying Edward Ward (no relation to Elizabeth Ward Baker) \$10 to take him to Fillmore (eighty-eight miles north of Parowan) by wagon. In the meantime, Baker and his wife were taken to Fillmore by Alexander Williams. Despite a snow storm on November 23, Martineau, Ward, Williams, and the Bakers all arrived on Saturday, November 24, and lawyers Hosea Stout and John Bair were engaged to defend Baker.

Stout and Bair spent Sunday investigating the murder charge against Baker; but on Monday morning, Stout surprisingly brought a second charge against Baker on behalf of the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF) for \$155.20. The judge had all of the foreign language interpreters discharged except for Dimick B. Huntington. (Huntington, who spoke Ute, remained because a Ute named Charles was on trial at the same time for an unrelated murder.) Bair defended Baker in the PEF suit but “confessed judgement for the amount of the demand,”

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<sup>27</sup>Jesse N. Smith, *Autobiography*, 23–24.

<sup>28</sup>Godfrey and Martineau-McCarty, *An Uncommon Common Pioneer*, November 13, 1855, 87.

amount of the demand,” and Stout won an execution of a payment for the monies owed, including court costs. Elizabeth was not charged and does not appear in the court record—only in Martineau’s diary. For Baker’s case, a petit (or traverse) jury was impaneled by the court, consisting of Warren S. Snow and Orville S. Cox of Manti, Jeremiah Hatch, Charles Price, John Mangum, and William R. Holden of Nephi, William Stevens Sr. and Charles Williams of Cedar City, and Fillmore locals Lewis Bronson, George W. Catlin, and Allen Russell. John W. Cazier Sr. of Nephi was the twelfth juror, despite not being listed on the November 1855 term’s jury roster.<sup>29</sup> No petit juror was impaneled from Parowan, probably since Parowan’s residents personally knew about the abuse. The jurors were sworn in, and initially two counts were brought against Baker, but Stout and Bair successfully moved to quash the first count, whatever it was, which took up half of the day. However, the second count, for second-degree murder, was sustained. Then the prosecuting territorial attorney, Joseph A. Keltling, read the indictment to Baker, who pled not guilty.

Territorial Supreme Court Associate Justice William W. Drummond presided over the district court. He was no friend of the Mormons, and they in turn hated him fiercely for his hypocrisy. While he harangued against the immorality of their polygamy, he lived openly in adultery with a prostitute he had brought from Washington, D.C., while his wife and children remained back east. In Fillmore, Martineau bitterly reported, that beside Drummond “on the [judicial] bench sat a strumpet, [he] calls wife falsely.”<sup>30</sup>

The rest of November 26 was taken up with introducing witnesses. Alexander Williams was sent to Parowan to summon witnesses for Baker’s defense and execute the sale of Baker’s property to pay off the PEF debt.<sup>31</sup> *People v. Samuel G. Baker* lasted the rest of the week, although the prosecution closed its case on Wednesday, November 28.<sup>32</sup> Stout sourly reported, “The Judge took a very active part in the trial against the prisoner and today even took on himself the examina-

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>31</sup>Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press and Utah State Historical Society, 1964), November 26, 1855, 567.

<sup>32</sup>Second District Court Minute Books, 80–84.



tion of the witnesses very unbecomingly.”<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately details of the trial do not seem to have survived, although a letter that James H. Martineau wrote soon after the trial reports Mrs. Baker “swearing (the truth) against her husband, at Fillmore.”<sup>34</sup> Pleading closed on Friday, November 30; the case was submitted to the jury; and the court adjourned until the following day.<sup>35</sup>

On Saturday morning, the jury was divided but, after further deliberation in the afternoon, “brought in a Verdict of murder in the Second degree.” The foreman (probably Warren S. Snow, as his name heads the list of jurors) read the verdict and statement fixing Baker’s “term of imprisonment in the Penitentiary at ten years at hard labor.” This was the most lenient sentence that could be given for second-degree murder. The Utah Territorial Legislative Assembly had passed Title II of “An Act in Relation to Crimes and Punishments” on March 6, 1852. Sections 4 and 5 mandated, “Whoever kills any human being, with malice aforethought, either expressed or implied, is guilty of murder.” Such a murder that involved poison or lying in wait or premeditation, or was committed while also involving “arson, rape, robbery, mayhem, or burglary is murder of the first degree; and shall be punished with death.” Section 6 provided, “Whoever commits murder otherwise than is set forth in the preceding section, is guilty of murder in the second degree; and shall be punished by imprisonment for life, or for a term not less than ten years.”<sup>36</sup> Since Isaac Whitehouse’s murder did not involve premeditation or the other criminal activities listed, it was not judged to be a first-degree murder and, therefore, was not a capital offense. Although the punishment for second-degree murder included the possibility of life impris-

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<sup>33</sup>Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, November 28, 1855, 567.

<sup>34</sup>James H. Martineau, Letter to Jesse N. Smith, December 16, 1855, George A. Smith Papers, 1834–77, MS 1322, Box 5, fd. 7, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>35</sup>Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, November 30, 1855, 568; and Second District Court Minute Books, 84.

<sup>36</sup>Utah Legislative Assembly, *Acts Resolutions and Memorials Passed by the First Annual and Special Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah, 1851* (Great Salt Lake City, Utah: Brigham H. Young, 1852), 117–18, in <http://content.lib.utah.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/uthis/stat/id/448/rec/> (accessed February 2014). I have added terminal punctuation where needed in quotations from the following documents.

onment, Samuel Baker, despite the heinousness of the crime, received the lightest sentence possible.

Stout and Bair, as counsel for the defense, then “claimed until Monday to file a motion in arrest of judgement.”<sup>37</sup> The trial being over for Martineau, he prepared to leave Saturday morning for Parowan. The Parowan Stake president, John C. L. Smith (no relation to the prominent Smith family), was also in Fillmore, having been called there to be a grand juror, but he had suddenly grown gravely ill. Martineau arranged for a bed to be made in a carriage for President Smith’s comfort and drove him back to Parowan, caring for him during the long journey. The timing of Smith’s illness seemed ominous to some locals, and the rumor in Parowan arose that their stake president was “laboring under Mrs. S. G. Baker’s curse” for having testified against her husband.<sup>38</sup>

On Monday, December 3, 1855, the court met again, waived the motion in arrest of judgment, and “no further Motion being made on this Case,” the judge pronounced sentence on “poor Baker,” as Stout put it. Considering the crime, Stout’s sympathy, and the light sentence raises questions about the testimony of the witnesses, including Baker’s plea of “not guilty,” that may have influenced this verdict. Baker was “delivered into the hands of Josiah Call Sheriff of Millard County to be conveyed within Eight days to the Penitentiary of Utah Territory there to Serve for the term of ten years at hard Labor,” and the court gave the petit jurors a “leave of absence” until the next convening of the court in January.<sup>39</sup>

Mrs. Baker’s pregnancy was at or near full term, and she went into labor herself that same day, while in Fillmore. “Bereft of all she had on earth,” as Hosea Stout reported, due to the family’s debts to the PEF, and now losing her husband to prison for ten years, Elizabeth

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<sup>37</sup>Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, December 3, 1855, 568; and Second District Court Minute Books, 85.

<sup>38</sup>“Grand Jurors,” Second District Court Minute Books, 62, line 3; Godfrey and Martineau-McCarty, *An Uncommon Common Pioneer*, December 2, 1855, 88; and James H. Martineau, Letter to Jesse N. Smith, December 16, 1855, 1, George A. Smith Papers. Under U.S. federal common law, spousal privilege is held only by the witness-spouse and therefore he or she may testify against the party-spouse.

<sup>39</sup>Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, December 3, 1855, 568; and Second District Court Minute Books, December 3, 1855, 87.

Ward Baker gave birth under the worst of circumstances. Stout (facetiously) reported that she named the boy Douglas Drummond Baker, after both Stephen Douglas and Judge Drummond, who just sent her husband to prison—"in token of his some day becoming a great man and a leading Democrat." In reality, the baby was named John Samuel Baker after his father and "John" probably for Elizabeth's father, John Ward. Immediately after the birth, Sheriff Call took Samuel on the four-day journey to Salt Lake City for incarceration in the territorial penitentiary in Sugarhouse to begin serving his sentence.<sup>40</sup> Coincidentally, the warden of the newly constructed penitentiary was Daniel Garn, the Mormon elder who had presided over the approximately 480 Mormon immigrants on the *Windermere* in 1854—the ship on which the Whitehouses, the Bakers, and Elizabeth Ward all sailed to America.

Garn received Samuel G. Baker into the prison on December 8, and recorded his "nativity" as Warwickshire, England, his age as twenty-seven (actually twenty-five), and his height at five feet nine and a half inches. Baker was also described as being fair complexioned, with auburn hair, a medium forehead, blue eyes, a straight nose, a "common mouth," good teeth, and a round chin.<sup>41</sup>

Back in Parowan, during the rest of the month, John C. L. Smith continued to fail, prompting Martineau's uneasy letter to Jesse N. Smith about Mrs. Baker's curse.<sup>42</sup> Martineau mentioned the acute food shortage that the Parowan Mormons were suffering, leading to intense inhospitality that bordered on the murderous. He explained to Jesse N. Smith that shortly after Jesse had left Parowan (his current location is not given in the letter), "four California emigrants arrived here, with several animals." The travelers were desperately seeking to replenish their supplies for the last push across the deserts of southern Utah and through the Mojave. Martineau reminded Smith, "You

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<sup>40</sup>Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier*, December 3, 1855, 568–69; and Arrest Warrant, Hon. William W. Drummond to Sheriff Josiah Call, December 1, 1855, Record of United States Prisoners, 1855–66, Series 3912, Reel 1, Box 1, fd. 1, 3A, Utah State Archives. A different copy of this warrant appears in Warrants of Confinement, 1854–59, Series 3912, Reel 1, Box 2, fd. 3, n.p.

<sup>41</sup>Record of United States Prisoners, 3B.

<sup>42</sup>Godfrey and Martineau-McCarty, *An Uncommon Common Pioneer*, May 21, 1855, 73.

know the situation of things here in regard to breadstuffs and other provisions, and our laws and regulations regarding the keeping of them here, and that in an especial manner we should not let gentiles have it to carry off."<sup>43</sup>

Martineau mentioned that John C. L. Smith's "mind on the subject . . . precisely agrees with mine, that the gentile emigration may get out of the country as they came in—on their own hook." He then explained the necessity for such callous, if not outright fatal, "laws and regulations." "They shall not eat that which belongs to the saints, to prevent the poor and destitute from suffering." Faith in biblically mandated compassion, hospitality to strangers, and charity notwithstanding, the proverbial widow's mite was not found in early Utah's arid desert landscape. Rather the Mormons followed the Yankee gospel of "God helps those who help themselves." The intense financial and physical stress that Samuel G. Baker must have felt was felt by all, testing their Bible-based morality to the core. How do you feed a stranger passing through when that means you or a family member will likely die of hunger a few months later?

#### THE GUBERNATORIAL PARDON

As the month of December progressed and John C. L. Smith's illness worsened each day, other machinations regarding Samuel G. Baker continued in Iron County. Unfortunately the details are unknown; but for some reason, after the Parowan Ward had unanimously voted to excommunicate Baker and his wife for the torture-murder of Isaac Whitehouse, a "large number of persons citizens of Iron County" (at the time, basically the towns of Parowan, Paragonah, and Cedar City), circulated a petition to have Brigham Young, as governor, pardon Baker, claiming that he was innocent. Who created and distributed the petition is unknown, although it certainly would have been done with at least the knowledge of George A. Smith. Despite the widespread understanding of the locals, the confession of Mrs. Baker, the clear evidence in the case, and a guilty verdict by a court of law indicating that the Bakers had committed this atrocity upon an innocent and helpless youngster, apparently a large number of residents signed it because "they do not believe that said Baker either willfully, intentionally or maliciously did commit said act, and he ought to be

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<sup>43</sup>Martineau to Jesse Smith, December 16, 1855, 2.

fully pardoned.”<sup>44</sup> Significantly, neither the petition nor any other document, even at the rumor level, proposes any other candidate for the murder, so Elizabeth Ward Baker’s confession must be believed. The petition was then delivered to Young in Fillmore at the newly completed south wing of the territorial statehouse, the only part of the capitol to be constructed. Young signed it and, on December 29, 1855, sent the petition along with other necessary paperwork to his clerk, Daniel Mackintosh, in Salt Lake City, to be completed.<sup>45</sup>

Despite my extensive investigation of these documents and others searching for clues to Young’s motivation to so readily provide a pardon for such a heinous crime, an answer remains elusive. Why would the citizens of Iron County, many of whom knew the Bakers and what they had done and had voted to excommunicate them, suddenly have a change of heart and circulate a petition for a pardon? The timeliness of the petition feels somewhat orchestrated. Could it have been generated by local Apostle George A. Smith? If so, had Young ordered him to arrange the petition so Young could then pardon Baker? But why? Young had little or nothing to gain by the pardon. Samuel G. Baker was an indebted, impoverished pearl button-maker in a remote settlement with no Church calling and little if anything to contribute to “the kingdom.” The doctrine of blood atonement was then current, requiring a Mormon who had been sealed by the priesthood and who had then committed certain extreme sins or crimes (murder, adultery, interracial marriage, and horse theft among others) to be executed by the shedding of his own blood, in order to receive forgiveness. If any case might require such a judgment, the murder of Isaac Whitehouse seems to qualify. However, I found no evidence that Samuel G. Baker had participated in a sealing ritual. Did this place him outside the realm of ecclesiastical justice? And if so, why was civil justice also thwarted? Did Church leaders’ ire towards the hypocritical Judge Drummond lead them to advocate for an injustice against Isaac Whitehouse, in order to prove just how little control Drummond had over the territorial justice system?

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<sup>44</sup>Samuel G. Baker’s Official Pardon, Territorial Penitentiary Wardens’ Administrative Records, January 24, 1856, 2–3, Utah State Archives, Series 3912, Reel 2, Box 2, fd. 10.

<sup>45</sup>Daniel Mackintosh, Letter to Brigham Young, January 2, 1856, Brigham Young Office Files Transcriptions by Edyth J. Romney, MS 2736, Box 3, fd. 2.

In the meantime, in Salt Lake City, Mackintosh discovered that Young had failed to include his signatures in the appropriate places but filled out what he could. Young also thought that Mackintosh had the territorial seal which needed to be affixed to the pardon, but Curtis S. Bolton informed Mackintosh that the seal had just been forwarded to Fillmore. So on January 9, Mackintosh returned the mostly completed pardon (backdated to January 3, 1856) to Young for his signature and the territorial seal. That same day, Mackintosh also addressed a letter to the unnamed "Sheriff of Iron County" from the "Governor's Office" in Salt Lake which included a copy of Baker's pardon. "But therein," wrote Mackintosh, "is left two blanks for you to fill, because the petition from citizens of Iron County did not contain the necessary information to execute the paper in full."<sup>46</sup>

Also on January 9, Calvin C. Pendleton, a counselor in the Parowan bishopric, wrote to George A. Smith that he had just learned that the town selectmen and as others in Parowan, had been "deeply censured by the Authorities of the Church, in regard to the Baker case, it having been supposed they were in possession [of] a knowledge of the train of ill treatment, of the deceased boy, for a considerable length of time prior to his death."<sup>47</sup>

Pendleton disabused Apostle Smith of that idea: "This I do not think was the case with any of the Presidency here, of the County Court," insisted Pendleton. "Complaint had never been made to said court, or to any member thereof." After recounting his above-described, limited encounters with the boy prior to his murder, Pendleton reported, "The attorney on the part of the defence were

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<sup>46</sup>Daniel Mackintosh, Letter to Iron County Sheriff, January 2, 1856, 419, Young Letterbook, 1851-58, Utah State Archives, Series 13844, Reel 1; another nearly identical copy is found on p. 422. The official signed and sealed original pardon is found in Territorial Penitentiary Wardens' Administrative Records, January 24, 1856, 1-3, Series 3912, Reel 2, Box 2, fd. 10, Utah State Archives. It was notarized by Almon W. Babbitt. A copy of the pardon is found in Secretary of State Executive Record Books, 44, Series 242, Reel 2, Utah State Archives. Referred to here is a third copy of the pardon. In it, as Mackintosh indicated, two blank places had been left but were later filled out lightly in another hand. One blank was for the name of Judge William W. Drummond and the other for the month of the court's term (in this case, November 1855).

<sup>47</sup>Pendleton to George A. Smith, January 9, 1856, 1.

apprized of the true state of affairs relative to the knowledge of the affair, and proceedings both of the presidency here, and the county officers." He then added a sentence in his own defense: "Let my faults be what they may, I know this much, that [I,] Pendleton never looked quietly on, and disregarded the sufferings of his fellow creatures, and <trust> I shall not be condemned from the hearing of the case."<sup>48</sup>

Both the Territorial Legislature and the Second District Court wound up their business in Fillmore on January 16. Two days later, Brigham Young, the legislative body, and its entourage left Fillmore. Hosea Stout personally carried Baker's pardon, now properly sealed but still not properly signed by Governor Young. On January 20, William H. Dame was called to return to Parowan from where he had been homesteading in Red Creek (now Paragonah), to be set apart as the new president of the Parowan Stake, a position he held until 1880. (John C. L. Smith had succumbed to his final illness on December 30, 1855).<sup>49</sup> Stout arrived with Baker's unsigned pardon in Salt Lake City on January 22. Finally, on January 24, Stout got Young to sign the pardon, with Almon W. Babbitt notarizing it.<sup>50</sup> Stout then delivered the pardon to Daniel Carn that same day, and Samuel G. Baker was released on January 25.<sup>51</sup> Baker showed up at Stout's home "rejoicing that his term of ten years had expired so soon." For his crime, he had been imprisoned approximately forty-eight days, from about

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Andrew Jenson, "John Calvin Lazelle Smith," *Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1901), 1:532, <http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/BYUIBooks/id/3527> (accessed January 2014).

<sup>50</sup>Orders of Release, 1856–64, Territorial Penitentiary Wardens' Administrative Records, January 24, 1856, 1–3, Series 3912, Reel 2, Box 2, fd. 10, Utah State Archives. This is the original pardon, signed in Brigham Young's hand, with the territorial seals affixed. Almon W. Babbitt signed and dated it as well, as Secretary of the Territory. Two months later, Babbitt left Utah for Washington, D.C., and was killed by Cheyenne Indians in Nebraska Territory.

<sup>51</sup>Jesse N. Smith, *Autobiography*, 24, was a lawyer in the case and member of the Parowan Stake presidency. He erroneously reported that Baker's trial "came off when the Bakers were acquitted." It is interesting that he remembered both Samuel and Elizabeth Baker as being on trial. Further, Smith apparently confused "pardoned" with "acquitted."

December 8, 1855, to January 25, 1856.

Elizabeth Baker, with her newborn son, traveled to Salt Lake City; and on February 3, just nine days after being released from the penitentiary, Brigham Young performed the ceremony that sealed Samuel G. Baker to Elizabeth Ward Baker for eternity in his office.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, not only had Baker been pardoned of the murder, but both Bakers had been reinstated into full fellowship in the Church, although I have found no record of their rebaptism nor a cancellation of their excommunication. Then on February 22, 1856, while Samuel and Elizabeth were visiting in Provo, the two again received patriarchal blessings, this time from Provo's stake patriarch, Emer Harris.<sup>53</sup>

During the month of February 1856, Utah officials conducted a fraudulent and erroneous census in the hopes of getting Congress's approval for statehood. This census has been proved to include the names of babies and young children, deceased people, and non-residents of Utah in an attempt to pad the numbers of adult residents. Samuel and Elizabeth Baker's names appear on this census; but it gives their place of residence as Millard County, not Parowan, Iron County. Additionally, little Edwin Baker, Samuel's son by his first wife, was included in the count of adult residents, but oddly as an inhabitant of Parowan, along with the dead Joseph Whitehouse, Isaac's younger brother.<sup>54</sup>

Although people outside of Parowan may have treated Samuel and Elizabeth Baker with respect, it is unlikely that the Parowan locals were as forgiving—especially those who had attended the inquest and

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<sup>52</sup>Sealings of Couples, Living and by Proxy, 1851–89, LDS Family History Library, film no. 183395, Vol. C (January 19, 1856–November 22, 1861).

<sup>53</sup>Samuel George Baker, Patriarchal Blessing, November [sic; February] 22, 1856, Index to Patriarchal Blessings, 1833–1963, LDS Family History Library, film 392634, 210:272; and Elizabeth Ward Baker, Patriarchal Blessing, February 22, 1856, film 392692, 210:273.

<sup>54</sup>1856 Utah Census Returns, LDS Family History Library film no. 505913, Millard County (no town), 767–68; and Parowan, Iron County, 693 and 698. Jesse N. Smith, *Autobiography*, 25, states that this padded census was mandated by the territorial legislature in January 1856 by the joint “‘Act providing for holding a Convention with a View to the Admission of Utah Territory into the Union as a State’ and an Act providing for the enumeration of the inhabitants of the Territory of Utah.”



seen Isaac's abused and defiled body. Having witnessed the Bakers' heinous treatment of the boy and having voted to excommunicate both of them for the murder, they may have not appreciated the interference of outsiders who were ignorant of the facts, even when those outsiders were ecclesiastical hierarchs. The townspeople may not have registered an official protest; but they could hardly have thought otherwise than that the Bakers had literally gotten away with torture and murder. What the Bakers thought of themselves and their situation, except for Samuel Baker's coarse joke about the speed with which his ten-year sentence had passed, is not known. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Bakers decided to leave Utah and the LDS Church.

#### THE BAKER FAMILY IN CALIFORNIA

Having once attempted to leave for California, apparently to escape legal prosecution for Whitehouse's murder, now Samuel G. Baker decided it best to start new lives away from others who would remember their sordid and scandalous past. The four departed together (date unknown): Samuel, his second wife, Elizabeth, their baby son John Samuel, and Samuel's son by his first wife, Edwin George. Behind them they left Elizabeth's murdered nephew in an unmarked grave. The Bakers apparently first moved in the late 1850s to the town of San Salvador, just south of San Bernardino. Some 500 Mormons had colonized there in 1851 with Apostle Amasa M. Lyman as the first mayor. However, with the approach of federal troops to quell the Mormon rebellion in 1856–57, Brigham Young recalled the Mormon settlers to Utah, gathering the faithful Saints to match the armies of Babylon. Although some Mormons stayed in the San Bernardino area just as the Bakers arrived—and hence were automatically considered apostates—the obedient Saints returned to Utah Territory. San Salvador was a small farming community that had been settled by Hispanic colonists from Abiquiú, New Mexico, in the 1840s.<sup>55</sup> Here Elizabeth Ward Baker gave birth to her second child, Joseph Ward Baker, on January 13, 1859. Nine months later, their daughter, Harriet, was

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<sup>55</sup>In 1843, my third great-grandparents, Antonio Rafael Garcia and Maria Luisa Lusero, migrated by mule train from Abiquiú, New Mexico, to San Salvador, California, along the Old Spanish Trail. It included Mountain Meadows in southern Utah, but they passed it some fourteen years before the infamous massacre.

born on October 3.<sup>56</sup> Samuel Baker became a naturalized U.S. citizen in October 1860 in San Bernardino.<sup>57</sup>

In January 1862, weeks of continuous rain and snow were followed by record high temperatures (melting the snow pack) and continued rain from January 9 to 12. Sweeping from Oregon to San Diego, and Utah to New Mexico, the “Great Flood” turned streams into rivers and rivers into floods, inundating valleys and whole towns. San Salvador was hit hard because of its location on the banks of the Santa Ana River, and nearly every adobe building in town was destroyed. Its Catholic parish church of San Salvador, constructed of adobe in 1853, was one of the few buildings that escaped. Farmlands were left strewn with sand and gravel. Baker’s farm was one of the casualties. He apparently moved his family to what is now the Los Nietos/Norwalk area of Los Angeles County, just southwest of Whittier.

One local county history incorrectly claims that the Bakers emigrated from England directly to California. Baker’s second son, John Samuel, born in Parowan at the end of the murder trial, is said in this same book to have been proud to be “a native-born son of the county” of Los Angeles. The published biography does not reveal the family’s conversion to Mormonism and some three years’ residence in Utah.<sup>58</sup> Doubtless Baker and his wife wished to gloss over these topics to avoid any notoriety over his being a convicted (if pardoned) murderer.

Genealogical research in California records has revealed the following data on the five children of Samuel G. Baker and Elizabeth Ward Baker who were born in California:

1. [John Samuel Baker, born December 1855 in Utah]
2. Joseph Ward Baker, born January 13, 1859, in San Bernardino County, California; married Edith Curtis on August 7, 1889, in Los Angeles County, California; died in late 1892.
3. Harriet Baker, born October 3, 1859, in San Salvador, San

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<sup>56</sup>1860 U.S. Federal Census, San Salvador, San Bernardino, California, 647.

<sup>57</sup>1888 Los Angeles County Great Register of Voters, 134, in California Voter Registers, 1866–98, Ancestry.com (accessed October 27, 2013).

<sup>58</sup>“John S. Baker,” in J. M. Guinn, *Historical and Biographical Record of Los Angeles and Vicinity* (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1901), 653.

Bernardino County; married William Surbeck October 18, 1881, in Los Angeles County; died 24 October 1883.

4. Mary Agnes Baker, born December 6, 1862, in California; married Benjamin F. Pritchard on April 21, 1892, in Los Angeles County.

5. Sarah Baker, born October 1, 1865, in California; married Stephen Mortimer Eliot on February 11, 1891, in Los Angeles County; died March 13, 1947, in Los Angeles.

6. Elizabeth (“Lizzie”) Baker, born July 27, 1869, in Norwalk, Los Angeles, California; married Frank Emerson Martin on January 2, 1895, in Norwalk; died April 16, 1948, in Orange County, California.

By the 1870 census, the entire Baker family was residing in Norwalk, Los Nietos Township, in Los Angeles County. Samuel G. Baker, a farmer, oddly reported that he was born in France. Edwin, his eldest son by his first wife, Sarah, had been born in England, but he is listed as having been born in Louisiana (apparently a tangential reference to New Orleans where the Bakers disembarked from the *Windermere* in 1854. John, born in Utah at the end of Samuel’s trial, is listed as being born in California.

In Los Angeles County, the Bakers thrived. Samuel Baker is said to have “accumulated a competency, assisted by the economy and prudence of his wife.” Politically, he was a Republican.<sup>59</sup> Edwin G. Baker was also enumerated in the 1870 census a second time, as being a farmer in Santa Ana. A year later, he married Sarah Elizabeth Meredith in Los Angeles; after 1872 but before 1874, Edwin and his growing family moved to Coos County, Oregon. After Sarah’s death in 1909, he remarried, and then died in Lane County, Oregon, before 1920.

Over the next two decades the Bakers in Los Angeles were involved in several minor lawsuits, mostly over real estate purchases by various family members as they grew wealthier. In one of their real-estate schemes, Samuel G. and his son John Baker helped to organize and incorporate the Norwalk Building Association in March 1892, and they were two of the association’s five directors. Their intention was to spend \$8,000 to build “a fine brick block” in Norwalk, containing two stores (a hardware store and a general merchandise store),

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

with a Masonic hall in the story above the stores.<sup>60</sup>

The Bakers also became heavily involved in one of the great tragedies of California's early settlement. The transformation from a Mexican territorial department in 1846 to a U.S. territory, and then to a state in 1850 was complicated and chaotic, playing off anti-Latino sentiments in the treatment of the large Mexican land grants. While the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo promised that U.S. government would honor the land grants, the onslaught of settlers due to the gold rush proved too much. The Latino (and mixed-race Indio-Latino) *rancheros* were repeatedly litigated to defend their claims from encroachment and squatting. Although land-rich, these *Californios* were often cash-poor and struggled to pay attorney fees and mortgages. Confirmation of a land grant required not only lawyers, but also translators, surveyors, and clerks. Lacking cash, the Latino owners often subdivided their lands, selling parts of the already disputed lands to white settlers to pay for the confirmation process which often took years. These smaller parcels of land were used for agriculture rather than cattle grazing. The Trespass Act of 1850 (which required California farmers to fence their lands to keep cattle out) was repealed in 1874, which forced the Latino cattle ranchers either to pay heavy prices to fence in their cattle or sell their stock at extremely low prices. Unable to read or write (or even speak) English, the *rancheros* were at the mercy of Anglo-American lawyers and others. The unscrupulous encircled the land-owning *Californios* like carrion eaters around a dying animal, waiting for an easy meal. The more the attorneys could litigate, the more money they could make. Single and widowed Latinas, who generally had enjoyed many more rights and more legal power than their Anglo sisters, were especially vulnerable to the new Anglo systems that they little understood. By the turn of the century, two of Samuel Baker's sons had become embroiled in one such battle over the legal possession of a subdivision of the land grant originally named Rancho El Escorpión de las Salinas.

The rancho was first a part of the Misión San Fernando Rey de España (also known as the San Fernando Mission). The last Mexican governor of Alta California Pío Pico granted the rancho to three Chumash-Ventureño Indians in 1845: Odón Eusebia, his son-in-law

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<sup>60</sup>"Articles of Incorporation," *Sacramento Daily Union*, March 19, 1892; and "Notes from Norwalk," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 28, 1892.

Urbano, and Urbano's son Mañuel. Once the U.S. government seized control of California, the 1851 Land Act required Odón and his family to file their claim, which they did in 1852.<sup>61</sup> However it took years for the government to patent their claim. In the meantime, Odón's daughter, Maria del Espíritu Santo Chijulla, became the common-law wife of a Basque sheepherder named Miguel Leonis. Leonis had purchased part of the Rancho El Escorpión in the 1850s and the rest of it in 1871. Leonis ruthlessly protected his lands from squatters by hiring bands of armed Mexicans and Indians to intimidate the locals. Espíritu Chijulla bore Leonis a daughter who died in 1880. Miguel Leonis claimed his common-law marriage with Espíritu Chijulla in a court proceeding. But when he died two years later, his will claimed that she was merely his housekeeper and gave all of his lands to his brother in Los Angeles and his siblings in France. Espíritu Chujilla contested the Leonis will and filed a petition for half of the estate. The case came before the California Supreme Court three times. Finally, a 1905 verdict declared her marriage to Leonis legal and valid, and she inherited 3,500 acres of the Leonis estate, including much of her father's Rancho El Escorpión in which she was born. Her victory was short-lived however, as she died in 1906.<sup>62</sup>

The Baker brothers entered this story soon after the death of Miguel Leonis. His widow then hired a young local tavern owner, also Basque, named Laurent Etchepare to be her agent in managing her allegedly inherited lands. However the scurrilous Etchepare persuaded her to sign over all of her land to him, telling her he could more easily sell off portions to pay her bills. Etchepare then began selling her lands at a fraction of their worth, swindling her out of tens of thousands of dollars. In apparent intentional collusion with Chujilla de Leonis's agent, Joseph Ward Baker bought a portion of Rancho El Escorpión on February 15, 1892, for only \$1,000, when the

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<sup>61</sup>"Southern Correspondence: Report of the Land Commissioners—Affairs in Los Angeles," *Daily Alta California*, October 23, 1852, 2; and "U.S. Land Commission," *Sacramento Daily Union*, April 26, 1854, 2.

<sup>62</sup>"Miguel Leonis Adobe," <http://www.laokay.com/halac/LeonisAdobe.htm>, and <http://www.leonisadobemuseum.org/history-leonis.asp> (accessed January 2014).

land was well worth four times that much.<sup>63</sup> (That summer, Joseph Ward Baker was also involved in a “hog poisoning case” with L. W. Smith, but whether he was the perpetrator or the victim is unknown.<sup>64</sup>) To complicate things even more, Joseph W. Baker died later that year, leaving his estate to his older brother, John Samuel Baker, who had been born in Utah at the end of their father’s murder trial. In November, John filed a petition for the probate of his brother’s will, the estate being valued at \$11,000 (some \$290,000 in today’s value). Baker then spent the following nine years deeply involved in various lawsuits trying to maintain his legal right to possess and resell that portion of Rancho El Escorpión which his brother had swindled from Espiritú Chujilla de Leonis.<sup>65</sup> Unfortunately, the ultimate outcome of Baker’s controversial land purchase from de Leonis is unknown due to confusing and fragmentary documentation. Since the newspaper reports involving John S. Baker cease in 1901, five years before the death of Mrs. de Leonis, some sort of legal settlement must have occurred.

One of John S. Baker’s many opponents in the legal battle over Rancho El Escorpión was French native George Le Mesnager. By 1898, Le Mesnager was an early vintner in Los Angeles County and he had apparently purchased part of the controversial rancho from Baker.<sup>66</sup> By 1900, John S. Baker had also become a vintner and was one of Le Mesnager’s main competitors. In 1903, Los Angeles County’s vintners

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<sup>63</sup>“Real Estate Transfers,” *Los Angeles Herald*, February 24, 1892, 7; and “A Relic of the Past: Queer Mode of Transferring Property in the Old Days,” *Los Angeles Herald*, March 8, 1896, 15.

<sup>64</sup>“The Courts,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 3, 1892, 3.

<sup>65</sup>“Court Notes,” *Los Angeles Herald*, November 11, 1892. For the legal chaos, see the following *Los Angeles Herald* articles: “Police Court Cases,” November 30, 1892; “Court Notes,” December 8, 1892; “And They Are Still There,” January 26, 1894; “New Suits Files,” February 8, 1894; “Serious Charges by Mrs. Leonis,” November 3, 1895; “A Relic of the Past,” March 8, 1896; “Point of Law,” May 16, 1897; “New Suits,” September 6, 1899; “Still Bobbing Up Serenely,” September 15, 1899; “Application Denied,” September 19, 1899; and “Judgments,” April 27, 1901. All accessible at the California Digital Newspaper Collection, [www.cdncr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc](http://www.cdncr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc) (accessed December 2013).

<sup>66</sup>See “Point of Law,” “Still Bobbing Up Serenely,” “Application Denied,” and “Judgments” cited in note 65.

were producing over two million gallons of wine. John S. Baker Wine Company of Santa Fe Springs was the largest producer, with 17,750 gallons. (Le Mesnager produced 24,500 gallons that year.

In the meantime, John S. Baker married Julia M. Mekeel on April 30, 1892, in Fresno, California. They had four children over the next decade: Hazel in 1894, Everett Jay in 1895, Leona in 1898, and Gertrude in 1902.<sup>67</sup> John Baker's 1901 biography describes him as a member of the Los Nietos Club, a Republican, Mason, and Odd Fellow. His extensive travels around the world earned him "a cosmopolitan knowledge that renders him a useful citizen." He died in Long Beach, California, on November 25, 1931.<sup>68</sup>

By the mid-1890s, Elizabeth Ward Baker had apparently left (and divorced?) Samuel, and she died in 1913.<sup>69</sup> About 1896, Samuel married his third wife, Sarah E. Holland Radford, the widow of Thomas Radford and the mother of two teenaged sons, Roy and Oscar Radford, who became members of Samuel's household.<sup>70</sup>

In 1900, John S. Baker went abroad, visiting "points of interest in Europe," and there attended the Paris Exposition. He returned to New York on August 25, 1900, aboard the S.S. *New York*.<sup>71</sup> Sarah Holland Radford Baker died in Los Angeles on August 24, 1902. During her life she "had amassed some money through careful handling of

<sup>67</sup>1900 U.S. Census, Los Nietos, Los Angeles, California, Los Angeles, ED 110, 21B; and various Public Member Trees, Ancestry.com (accessed November 2013).

<sup>68</sup>"John S. Baker," in Guinn, *Historical and Biographical Record of Los Angeles and Vicinity*, 653; and California Death Index: 1905–39, 304, Ancestry.com, [http://interactive.ancestry.com/5187/41547\\_B138957-00153/435887](http://interactive.ancestry.com/5187/41547_B138957-00153/435887), (accessed December 2013).

<sup>69</sup>"Elizabeth Baker," June 19, 1913, California Death Index: 1905–1939, 471, Ancestry.com, [http://interactive.ancestry.com/5187/41547\\_B138953-00133/656386](http://interactive.ancestry.com/5187/41547_B138953-00133/656386) (accessed December 2013).

<sup>70</sup>1900 U.S. Census, California, Los Angeles County, Los Angeles Fifth Ward, ED 49, 13A. The two boys had an older brother, Eric Hampden Radford, who was not raised by Baker; his 1946 death certificate gave their mother's maiden name as Holland.

<sup>71</sup>John S. Baker in Guinn, *Historical and Biographical Record of Los Angeles and Vicinity*, 653; and John S. Baker, "New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957," Ancestry.com, [http://interactive.ancestry.com/7488/NYT715\\_144-0768/4007069264](http://interactive.ancestry.com/7488/NYT715_144-0768/4007069264) (accessed November 2013).

her meager income,” and it amounted to some \$4,000 upon her death. Sadly she left no will, so the wily Samuel G. Baker applied to be the administrator of her estate and promptly stole \$1,000 in personal property from the estate.<sup>72</sup>

Samuel's last known appearance in the documentary record was in 1904 when he cheated his stepchildren out of their inheritance. After Samuel's mismanagement of their mother's estate, Roy and Oscar Radford asked the court to appoint a new administrator. The new appointee, J. F. Prush, a Los Angeles contractor, turned out to be as unethical and “negligent” as Baker had been. Attorney fees consumed nearly all of the brothers' inheritance. The case was in court “nearly a score of times” in three years, and a newspaper reporter called Sarah E. Radford Baker's estate “the most unfortunate in the history of western litigation.”<sup>73</sup> In addition, in January 1904, James M. Matlock filed a lawsuit against Samuel G. Baker for having traded Matlock's property with a property that Baker had already sold to the county sheriff. Matlock demanded a return of his original deed and \$250 in damages.<sup>74</sup> Then in September the Radford brothers had a Judge Trask order Samuel G. Baker to appear in court over his mismanagement of their mother's estate. However, as the *Los Angeles Herald* reported, “It is said that Baker has absconded and cannot be found.”<sup>75</sup> With that, Samuel George Baker, the former Mormon child abuser, convicted (and pardoned) murderer, and real estate cheat was never heard from again.

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<sup>72</sup>“Administrator Missing,” *Los Angeles Herald*, September 14, 1904, 5.

<sup>73</sup>“Attempt to End Baker Case,” *Los Angeles Herald*, October 25, 1905, 8.

<sup>74</sup>“Traded Forfeited Property,” *Los Angeles Herald*, January 30, 1904, 7.

<sup>75</sup>“Administrator Missing,” *Los Angeles Herald*.



# THE EARLY COMMUNITY OF CHRIST MISSION TO “REDEEM” THE CHURCH IN UTAH

*Steven L. Shields*

FROM THE EARLIEST YEARS of the Reorganization, Community of Christ,<sup>1</sup> leaders and members alike emphasized several theological questions that underscored its core values. They couched most of these questions in negative arguments against Brigham Young and

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<sup>1</sup>I use “Community of Christ” in the same sense that common convention in Mormon studies uses the current name of the LDS Church in Utah for all references, rather than referring to the original church until 1834 as “Church of Christ,” and then from 1834 to 1838 as “Church of the Latter Day Saints,” etc. “Community of Christ” was adopted in 2001. In traditional Community of Christ perspective, the Church became disorganized after the death of Joseph Smith Jr. and was subsequently reorganized. I use “Reorganization” to describe the historical era of the Church from the

his followers in Utah. Indeed, their main purpose was to “expose” the “evils of Mormonism” with particular personal animosity toward Brigham Young as a perceived usurper. Such animosity continued well into the twentieth century. This article reviews the history of early Community of Christ missionary work in Utah, with a particular focus on the content of the Church’s missionary periodical *The Messenger* (1874–76), whose purpose was declared to be “the deliverance of [the Utah church’s] victims.”

Edmund C. Briggs, a newly ordained apostle, and Alexander McCord arrived in Salt Lake City on August 7, 1863, as the first missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints<sup>2</sup> (the “Josephites,” or the “Reorganization”) to the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the “Brighamites”). Although their wagon journey from the Midwest of the United States to Utah must have been grueling, they lost no time setting to their mission and began preaching in the streets of the city. Their message was not particularly new, for the issues of authority and plural marriage had been debated among all the followers of Joseph Smith the Prophet for nearly twenty years.<sup>3</sup>

Briggs, McCord, and the missionaries who followed them over the next several decades, preached a three-fold message. First, the true successor to Joseph Smith, his eldest son, was the rightful prophet-president of the Church and had taken his place as such. Second, the usurper Brigham Young was without legal or spiritual authority and ruled as a dictator. Third, plural marriage was a false doctrine “and a means whereby Young held his followers in a bondage every bit as evil and horrible as southern slavery.”<sup>4</sup> Such sentiment was not unique to Briggs and his fellow missionaries or to the Reorganiza-

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mid-nineteenth century until the early twentieth century.

<sup>2</sup>Until the formal addition of “Reorganized” to the Church name in the early 1870s, both the Church in the Midwest and the Church in Utah had the same name, although one used the American and the other the British spelling convention.

<sup>3</sup>Mark A. Scherer, *The Journey of a People: The Era of Reorganization, 1844 to 1946* (Independence: Community of Christ Seminary Press, 2013), 265, 274.

<sup>4</sup>Edmund C. Briggs and R. N. Atwood, *Address to the Saints in Utah and California* (Plano, Ill.: Herald Publishing House, 1869 rev. ed.), 31, 39.

tion in general. Indeed, the 1856 Republican Party convention adopted a platform dedicated to abolishing both slavery and polygamy, in direct reference to Brigham Young and his followers.<sup>5</sup>

Richard L. Shipley, who studied the development of the early Reorganization in Utah, reported, "Prior to the spring emigration in 1865, small branches had been established or built up at Salt Lake City, Brigham City, Mount Fork (near Ogden), American Fork, Pleasant Grove, Provo, Spanish Fork, and Payson. Membership totaled over four hundred individuals. The spring of 1865 emigration left two skeleton branches in the territory. One was at Salt Lake City and the other at Provo." The spring emigration in 1867 left only four members in Utah. Branches at Box Elder, Camp Floyd, and Tooele disappeared, and the Salt Lake City branch was disorganized for several months.<sup>6</sup> This cycle of conversion and emigration continued for several years.

By the time Jason W. Briggs arrived in Salt Lake City and began publication of *The Messenger* in November 1874, the results of missionary efforts had dropped to almost nothing from an average of about 300 "redeemed" members each year. At the same time, not all of the members were emigrating from Utah at the first opportunity, and the Church's presence began to take on some stability.<sup>7</sup>

The first issue of *The Messenger* was published in November 1874 and was printed on the press of the *Union Vedette*, the newspaper sponsored by the United States military at Fort Douglas. Briggs had high hopes that his arguments, following the three-fold focus of missionary efforts in Utah for the previous decade, would rejuvenate the missionary effort and not only bring more "deluded" saints into the fold of the reorganization, but ultimately lead to the abandonment of plural marriage altogether.

*The Messenger* had little impact on the missionary effort. Briggs may have misjudged his audience. Utah had changed dramatically in the previous three decades. Not only was plural marriage well estab-

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<sup>5</sup>Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 55 ff.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Lyle Shipley, "Voices of Dissent: The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Utah, 1863–1900" (M.A. thesis, Utah State University, 1969), 49–51.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 71–76.

lished, but Brigham Young had also consolidated his authority over his followers, although not without dissent. Joseph Morris and several of his followers had been killed at South Weber in June of 1862. British converts William S. Godbe and his compatriots had established the Church of Zion late in 1869, inviting former LDS Apostle Amasa M. Lyman to become its prophet and president in 1870; however, the office was never instituted, as the church morphed into the Liberal Institute by the end of the year.<sup>8</sup> ZCMI was established in 1869 and the transcontinental railroad was completed the same year. Members who had been part of the original Kirtland-Missouri-and-Nauvoo church were an increasingly smaller percentage of Brigham Young's followers.

Nonetheless, Jason Briggs launched into the message of the Reorganization with great zeal. He printed twenty-six four-page issues (November 1874 to February 1877) except for the months of November and December 1876. As material, he published letters to the editor, filler from other periodicals, and the following major articles, most of which he wrote, but some of which were written by Zenas H. Gurley and others:

1. An extensive series on plural marriage, including a paragraph-by-paragraph commentary on what is now LDS Doctrine and Covenants 132.

2. A series titled "History of the Latter Day Apostasy"

3. A series on Adam

4. A series on pre-existence and transmigration, which focused primarily on refuting the key doctrines of the Church of Zion and the spiritualists

5. A series on the history of the Reorganization as a follow-up to the history of apostasy

6. A series titled "Was Joseph Smith a Polygamist?"

7. A general theological discussion on inspiration

8. A discussion of Zion and gathering

The series on plural marriage occupies 16.5 percent of the space in Volume 1 and was later published as a separate tract. Space devoted to plural marriage topics dropped to 11.5 percent in the second volume; but overall, polygamy-related topics lead the content,

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<sup>8</sup>Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Social and Religious Protests of the Godbeites against Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press/Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2009), 206–9.

with a total of 12.8 percent. The history of the Reorganization was the second most important topic, occupying 8.5 percent of total space in the publication, followed by the history of the latter day apostasy with 5 percent. Each of these three major topics was in alignment with the three-fold missionary message. I think it is helpful and interesting to review several examples of the style and content of *The Messenger*.

Briggs is forthright in his writing, from the motto of the paper “The truth shall make you free.—Jesus” to his declaration that the Reorganization is the “remedy” for the “blighted hopes” of those who came to Utah. He posed this appeal to his readers, “How many thousands of Latter Day Saints have come to these valleys in the fond hope of finding a people and surroundings in unison with their faith, as embraced in the earlier homes, and awoke from their fond dreams to the sad reality, that less faith, less peace, blessings, brotherly love, less kindness, charity, spirituality, and even common justice, existed here than among those whence they came.”<sup>9</sup>

Briggs and the other writers were intelligent and logical in their arguments. However, the often colorful rhetoric was sarcastic and blunt, and by today’s standards borders on libel. Of course, Brigham Young provided plenty of material to work with as well—and was equally blunt in return. However, if the late Leonard J. Arrington saw Brigham Young as “American Moses”<sup>10</sup> Briggs might well have labeled him “a Despotical Usurper and Petty Tyrant.” Despite the strong sentiment about who was right and who was wrong, the vigorous comments in today’s context are engaging to read and provide insight into how periodical pamphleteering operated in a bygone era.

At one point, writing on the “Utah Problem,” Briggs declared, “It is conceded on all sides that the religious, social and moral status of the Utah organization . . . is monstrous; at enmity with human progress . . . a real Moloch, at whose shrine the pure and devoted, the innocent and loving, are sacrificed . . . without remorse. . . . The truth is, the whole and sole cause of the evils under which Utah groans, is a perverted religion; a perverted priesthood; out of which grows a per-

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<sup>9</sup>Jason Briggs, “Blighted Hopes and Their Remedy,” *The Messenger* 1, no. 1 (November 1874): 4.

<sup>10</sup>Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

verted morality and social system.”<sup>11</sup>

Zenas H. Gurley excerpted several points from some of Brigham Young’s sermons in an essay titled “Words” and found that the “would-be prophet contradicts himself frequently” and denied the teachings of the Book of Mormon. Gurley declared, “To endorse the position of this imposter” fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah 17:5, 6, “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm . . . [for such] shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.” And Gurley was just getting started: “In conclusion we ask, can it be probable or even possible, that a man so crooked and inconsistent in his teaching, can be the mouthpiece of God to any people? . . . Mormons of Utah, you are slaves to a horde of petty tyrants, may the God of Israel enable you to arise in the dignity of human rights.”<sup>12</sup>

Briggs compared Brigham Young to the Book of Mormon king Noah, in an essay “Extraordinary Prophecy, and Its Fulfillment”: “How striking has this been re-enacted in this city and territory. The only difference perceivable is in the manner of gathering the people’s means. King Noah took the fifth [part of grain] at once and was done, whereas his anti-type in this valley begins with a tenth, and then follows up with a variety of different collections, donations, consecrations and special offerings; sealing and unsealing expenses, &c.”<sup>13</sup>

In another denunciation of Brigham Young, Briggs declared:

The most unmistakable proof that he is not the successor of Joseph Smith is in the fact that instead of teaching the revelations which had already been given, as the successor was to do, (sec. 14, par. 2), he contradicts them. For instance, he teaches that Adam, a creature, is all the God they have to do with; that polygamy is essential to salvation; that whoever rejects it will be damned; that murder was what Jesus meant by “loving your neighbor,” that God requires all Saints to give him a tenth of all they have, and special donations whenever called upon, to support his “many wives and concubines” and their children, and to rear

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<sup>11</sup>Jason Briggs, “Utah Problem,” *Messenger* 1, no. 2 (December 1874): 6.

<sup>12</sup>Zenas Gurley, “Words,” *Messenger* 1, no. 2 (December 1874): 8.

<sup>13</sup>Jason Briggs, “Extraordinary Prophecy, and Its Fulfillment,” *Messenger* 1, no. 4 (February 1875): 16.

them in luxury and idleness, King Noah like; that men should not think and act for themselves according to the dictates of their conscience, but “do as they are told.”<sup>14</sup>

The “Catechism for Grown-up Children in Utah,” published in two lessons, is a good example of Briggs’s sarcasm:

Question—What is the Mormon creed?

Answer—Mind your own business.

Q—What is ones [sic] business?

A—To do as you are told. . . .

Q—What is the crime of incest?

A—No such hair-splitting recognized in Utah. . . .

Q—Who holds the keys? A—Brigham Young.

Q—What are the keys expected to open, or effect?

A—Open every man’s granary, or bin, chicken-coop, pig-sty, kitchen, cellar, and wallet; and deplete them. . . .

Q—What is a Josephite?

A—One who hangs on the rod of Iron, that we let go of.<sup>15</sup>

And from “Lesson II,” “Q—Why is it the policy of the president [Brigham Young] to keep the people poor? A—Because they are ‘easier handled.’ . . . Q—What did Amasa say, previous to his apostasy, when asked what became of the tithing? A—None of your d—d business . . . Q—What did President Brigham Young say he could do, if the people would give him their money? A—Buy Congress and the eastern editors.”<sup>16</sup>

As noted previously, the theme occupying the majority of Briggs’s editorial space was an ongoing denunciation of plural marriage. He and others wrote extensively on the topic, covering it from various angles. In one number of “*The Messenger*,” under the title “Man’s Cruelty to—Woman,” Briggs wrote, “I have been reading the ‘Millennial Star,’ and lay down the book, sick at heart. I have heard and read a great deal about the sugar coating of the filthy pill of polygamy. . . . The drift of the entire system, from first to last; all their sermons and writings upon education, law, order, marriage, and everything else that refers to woman at all, tends to make her feel her inferiority; that God committed her and her rights to man. . . . She must

<sup>14</sup>Jason Briggs, *Messenger* 1, no. 6 (April 1875): 24.

<sup>15</sup>Jason Briggs, “Catechism for Grown-up Children in Utah,” *Messenger* 1, no. 9 (July 1875): 34.

<sup>16</sup>Jason Briggs, “Lesson II,” *Messenger* 1, no. 10 (September 1875): 44.

. . . not murmur, for her future bliss depends, not upon her virtue, but upon the glory of her husband.”<sup>17</sup>

Briggs’s major contribution to *The Messenger* is his serial article, “The Basis of Polygamy,” which began in the second issue of the first volume (December 1874) and concluded in the June 1875 issue (1, no. 8). This treatise is a detailed historical and critical analysis of the “so-called revelation of July 12th, 1843,” known now as section 132 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants. He takes his readers through the document paragraph by paragraph, reciting events at Nauvoo, interviews with Emma Smith, interviews and published statements by others. Briggs maintains Joseph Smith’s innocence in the matter—suggesting that if Joseph Smith was lying about it, everyone was in trouble. He constructs his case carefully for laying the blame for plural marriage at the feet of Brigham Young. His logical dissection of the document and his careful analysis and conclusions constitute an erudite “minority report” on the document, which ought to be considered by students of the topic, rather than being dismissed along with other such publications as “anti-Mormon rhetoric.” Briggs and others were serious about the topic and had an important alternate viewpoint to express.

Briggs notes in paragraph 1,<sup>18</sup> that Joseph declares he had asked God about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. (Isaac, though usually included with the polygamous patriarchs, was not, according to the Genesis account, the husband of anyone but Rebekah.) Given Joseph Smith’s claims, Briggs is mystified about why Joseph was still unclear on the topic. “Is it not passing strange that Joseph Smith, who had translated, as he said by the gift of God, the Book of Mormon, in which it is written that the acts of plurality on their part [David and Solomon] are abominable . . . was it not strange, we say, that with this statement so lately received from the Lord, Joseph Smith should ask the question how the Lord justified those same men?” Perhaps it was in Smith’s darkness, having already disregarded

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<sup>17</sup>Jason Briggs, “Man’s Cruelty to—Woman,” *Messenger* 1, no. 4 (February 1875): 15. The *Millennial Star* was the LDS Church publication in the British Isles.

<sup>18</sup>Joseph Smith’s 1843 revelatory document about polygamy was not published in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants until 1876. Briggs therefore used paragraph numbers rather than the current versification.



the Book of Mormon, that Joseph “did ask so causeless a question.”<sup>19</sup>

Paragraphs 2 and 3 deal with the doctrine of concubinage, which is declared a “holy institution” in paragraph 14. However, the third paragraph declares that those who do not “receive the covenant” are to be in a saved condition like the angels. However, Briggs noted, this declaration conflicts with paragraph 1 which declares such to be “damned.” Furthermore, these “poor angels” cannot be gods like those who have multiple wives. Briggs confesses himself mystified by the inconsistencies he finds in the document.<sup>20</sup>

These several paragraphs deal with the doctrine of “enlargement” or “exaltation,” and Briggs finds the key to understanding this belief in paragraph 8. It is, basically, eternal lives. He credits Orson Pratt with an explanation that “this clause means that the whole celestial and enlarged retinue, . . . when they have passed by the angels and the gods . . . will proceed to fill [the location which is empty and will fulfill the promise to Rebecca that she would be the mother of thousands of millions [Gen. 24:60] . . . [s]uch a continuous multiplication being the ‘continuation of the lives’ and the chief glory.”<sup>21</sup>

Paragraphs 9 and 10 contain declarations about sin, transgression, and blasphemies. The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is defined as murder. However, those who have entered into the “new and everlasting covenant” will not be denied their exaltation. However, in Briggs’s analysis, paragraph 10 contradicts paragraph 6. Briggs expresses incredulity: “[Paragraph 9] is so revolting to the whole tenor of the gospel, that if the devil ever wrote a revelation with his own fingers, this paragraph must be the one. How favored are the polygamists? They may indulge in any single sin, any transgression, or in all, and in ‘all manner of blasphemies,’ and it will not stand in the way of their exaltation in the least.”<sup>22</sup>

The definition of adultery in paragraph 16, Briggs says, “is one of the advanced principles of Brighamism.” The holy anointing absolves any woman of adultery because that is how “many wives and

<sup>19</sup>Jason Briggs, “The Basis of Polygamy,” *Messenger* 1, no. 4 (February 1875): 13.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>*Messenger* 1, no. 4 (February 1875): 14.

<sup>22</sup>Briggs, “The Basis of Polygamy,” *Messenger* 1, no. 5 (March 1875): 17.

gods are made and endowed." Eternal life is the "continuation of lives,' or the begetting and bearing of children through all time and eternity, and therefore any cessation in the progress of multiplication, or 'enlargement,' entails 'a loss.'" Paragraph 19 authorizes the prophet to take wives away from any man who is not faithful and give them to another. Briggs cautions against the "vast authority" that favors polygamists and grants to the president of the Church such sweeping powers.<sup>23</sup>

Reaching the 20th paragraph, Briggs expresses his frustration thus, "The whole thing looks to us at this point like a first-class burlesque, and we are tempted at this moment under this impression to drop its farther consideration. But a good brother assures us that thousands of good honest men and women in these vallies [sic] believe that document to be a revelation from God. . . . We therefore repress our emotions, and proceed."<sup>24</sup>

The so-called revelation on marriage is problematic, in Briggs's exegesis, because up to the point of the appearance of the document, any man who had sexual relations with a women who was not the single legal wife, would have been condemned as an adulterer. This was according both to the document on marriage (which had been in every edition of the Doctrine and Covenants since 1835) and the Book of Mormon. But now, "it is different. The Lord sanctifies the sin, and adopts this 'abomination' as a celestial order! If this is a 'nest egg of hell' instead of a celestial order, that which is hatched from it will justify such conclusion."<sup>25</sup>

In the later paragraphs, after long exhortations, Emma Smith is condemned to destruction if she does not accept plural marriage, but Briggs challenges

every candid believer in polygamy in Utah to consider and answer to their own conscience, whether in case Emma Smith having, as she did, rejected that revelation, had been within a few months after, murdered by a mob, would you not have regarded it as strong proof of the revelation? . . . And if Joseph had survived and received his 'hundred fold of wives,' the demonstration in favor of polygamy would have been complete. You must admit this. Then we demand what does it

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Briggs, "The Basis of Polygamy," *Messenger* 1, no. 5 (March 1875): 18.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

prove when, as the facts demonstrate, the threatened destruction falls upon the head of the faithful Joseph, and the rebellious Emma, as the Elect Lady, is not even moved out of her place, but remains with her children a living monument of the original faith—a standing protest against the ‘damnable heresies’ of the ‘seducing spirits,’ the real authors of this document in question. . . .

In paragraph twenty-two is the repetition of the promise to Joseph, ‘And behold and lo I am with him, as I was with Abraham thy father.’ Falsity is stamped upon this as upon every other promise peculiar to this document. Abraham lived to a good old age and fell asleep in the bosom of his family; while Joseph was cut off by his lawless and ruthless enemies, and in the prime and vigor of life . . . .

That [LDS 132] originated in deception and fraud, there can be no doubt. . . . It purports to have been given through Joseph Smith; which, if true, our conclusions respecting its character, would make him either the victim, or the instrument of deception and fraud.<sup>26</sup>

Briggs concludes that the doctrine of plural, or celestial, marriage, as outlined in LDS 132, is “a cursed doctrine; a fraud in its origin; false in principle; ruinous in practice; and founded in selfishness and lust; and only maintained by degradation on the one hand, and violence and despotism on the other; and as a system it constitutes in its connections the sink or ‘mystery of iniquity’ into which the latter day apostasy has taken the fatal plunge.”<sup>27</sup>

For Briggs, the final insult to the integrity of the gospel was the publication in 1876 of a new edition of the Doctrine and Covenants by the Church in Utah, the first since 1844.<sup>28</sup> In this new edition, the “article on marriage” which had been adopted by a solemn assembly of the Church and published in the first edition (and all since) of the Doctrine and Covenants, was dropped, and the new revelation authorizing plural marriage was included. Briggs denounced the 1876 edi-

<sup>26</sup>Briggs, “The Basis of Polygamy,” *Messenger* 1, no. 6 (April 1875): 22.

<sup>27</sup>Briggs, “The Basis of Polygamy,” *Messenger* 1, no. 8 (June 1875): 30.

<sup>28</sup>The 1844 edition, published in Nauvoo shortly after Joseph Smith’s death, included eight new revelations (numbered sections 103, 105, 112, 119, 124, 127, 128, and 135) in the current LDS edition but did not include section 132. In 1845, Wilford Woodruff, then a missionary in England, published 3,000 copies of the 1844 edition, using the same metal plates. Other reprintings followed, also in England, in 1846, 1849, 1852, 1854, 1866, and 1869. Robert J. Woodford, “Doctrine and Covenants Editions,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 426.

tion in vigorous terms: "This brazen attempt to establish polygamy by 'changing laws' is a characteristic of corrupters of the truth in every age and dispensation. . . . By what authority was this omission and addition? None whatever appears in the book. The Utah Elders including their Editors, have all along contended that said article did not interdict Polygamy. Then why leave it out? And why add the Polygamy article? And why do both without a shadow of authorization by the [conference] body?"<sup>29</sup>

Briggs and most of his contemporaries in the Reorganization were convinced that Joseph Smith Jr. was innocent of plural marriage; and at the very least, their argument in that regard was based on the ethical foundation to which they believed the beloved prophet of the Restoration subscribed. Briggs denounced the argument that it was somehow not "prudential" for Joseph and Hyrum to state the truth about polygamy in Nauvoo but instead had repeatedly published denials of plural marriage in *Times and Seasons* and elsewhere. Briggs reported with scorn that an unnamed son of Daniel H. Wells, a counselor in Brigham Young's First Presidency,<sup>30</sup> had told him that a parallel example was Peter's denial of Christ, thus "by telling one lie, and repeating it twice, he saved his life and was enabled to preach Christ and perform a great work for others."<sup>31</sup>

Briggs exclaimed:

This is pure Brighamism. But what a confession! The prophet and patriarch, the two first presidents of the church, after receiving a revelation authorizing polygamy, and threatening 'damnation' to all who reject it, solemnly declare that no such doctrine is believed or practiced,—telling a lie, because it was not prudent at that time to tell the truth! And this falsehood was repeated as occasion required, for nine years, when it became 'prudent' to proclaim the truth. Is it this schooling in duplicity that guarantees their truthfulness now[?]. Is the impeachment of a witness necessary or likely to give value to their testimony? . . . Similar "prudential" statements are usually made by all

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<sup>29</sup>Briggs, "The New Edition," *Messenger* 3, no. 2 (February 1877): 1, 2.

<sup>30</sup>This son may have been Junius F. Wells who served a mission in the Midwest. Paul Thomas Smith, "Junius F. Wells," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 4:1561. The two men met at Canton, Illinois, on March 8, 1876.

<sup>31</sup>Briggs, "The Basis of Polygamy," *Messenger* 2, no. 6 (April 1876): 22.

classes of wrong doers, when charged; so that it must be seen that there is a strong probability that common people will confound Brighamites with other liars, and part of the great family of scamps and deceivers.<sup>32</sup>

Briggs was the chief proponent of the Reorganization and contributed to its formative years as much as, or more than, any other person. One of the first apostles of the Reorganization, he served as president of the Council of Twelve. However, his editorial tone, as well as his deviation from what many considered the core doctrines of the Church, caused his recall from Utah and the cessation of *The Messenger*. In 1877, the general conference failed to sustain him as an apostle, although he was shortly afterward reinstated. Then in 1885 he was not sustained again and, in 1886, left the Church to which he had devoted much of his life.<sup>33</sup> The Church replaced Briggs's paper with the *Saints' Advocate* in 1878 under the editorship of Zenas H. Gurley and W. W. Blair. This missionary paper continued its publication for eight years, coming to a close in June 1886.<sup>34</sup>

Both missionary publications of the Reorganization offer a wealth of information about the worldview of the Church in the Midwest compared to the worldview of the Church in Utah. The different views of the development of the LDS Church's history and doctrines, practices, and administrative systems deserve to be looked at through the lens of Briggs's "minority report" and considered in contrast to the viewpoint of the "majority report" of Brigham Young and his followers.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years, Vol. 2* (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1993), 113.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 124–25.

# ELAINE ANDERSON CANNON, YOUNG WOMEN GENERAL PRESIDENT: INNOVATIONS, INSPIRATION, AND IMPLEMENTATIONS

*Mary Jane Woodger*

IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, leadership comes from the lay membership. As individuals are called to lead auxiliaries, their unique personalities and skills, along with their response to the issues of their day make indelible fingerprints upon Church organizations. Often the individual's education, personality, and attributes have a great influence in the development of programs; each of the thirteen women who have served as the president of the Young Women's organization under its various names has made unique contributions to the Church.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps among the most significant of these leaders is Elaine Anderson Cannon—the eighth president of the Young Women organization

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<sup>1</sup>The following have served as general Young Women presidents: Elmina Shepard Taylor (1880–1904); Martha Horne Tingey (1905–29); Ruth May Fox (1929–37); Lucy Grant Cannon (1937–48); Bertha S. Reeder (1948–61); Florence Smith Jacobsen (1961–72); Ruth Hardy Funk (1972–78); Elaine Anderson Cannon (1978–84); Ardeth Greene Kapp (1984–89); Janette C. Hales (1992–97); Margaret D. Nadauld (1997–2002); Susan Winder Tanner (2002–8); Elaine S. Dalton (2008–13); and Bonnie L. Oscarson (2013–).



*Elaine Anderson Cannon, Young Women general president. Photo courtesy of Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.*

(1978–84). Cannon’s influence is still evident in the Church and in the individual lives of young women who participated under her leadership.

### ELAINE CANNON’S ERA

Elaine Cannon was president during one of the greatest eras of change for women in America. The women’s liberation movement was in full bloom, seeking greater equality in the education system, the workplace, and the home.<sup>2</sup> By 1978, when Cannon became president of the Latter-day Saint auxiliary for teenage girls, the feminist movement not only included demands for economic and legal equality but also psychological and sexual equality. Feminists who worked against the “oppression of women” had a great influence upon society and also on Church members. They sought change by protesting or picketing specific groups associated with the government, media, educational institutions, and religions.<sup>3</sup> Their approach led to divisiveness and polarized opinions over the definition and application of “equality” between men and women both in and out of the Church.

History frequently credits the popularity of Betty Friedan’s 1963 bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique*, as a factor in articulating the feminist cause. By posing the question, “What does it really mean to be a woman?” and by providing strong reasons why an exclusive focus on homemaking limited a woman from reaching her full potential, Friedan’s persuasive volume brought the suppressed discontentment of thousands of women to the surface.<sup>4</sup> American media responded with myriad questions, assertions, and demands, which in turn focused both women and men on finding solutions to satisfy their new awareness and meet long-repressed needs.<sup>5</sup> Friedan reasoned that women needed a new life plan because being only a wife and mother

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<sup>2</sup>Christina Fisanick, ed., *Feminism: Opposing Viewpoints* (San Diego, Calif.: Greenhaven Press, 1995), 14.

<sup>3</sup>Tonya Bolden, ed., *33 Things Every Girl Should Know about Women’s History: From Suffragettes to Skirt Lengths to the E.R.A.* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 164.

<sup>4</sup>Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton and Company, 1963), 12.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.



brought “suffering and emptiness.”<sup>6</sup> By the time Cannon became Young Women president, the women’s liberation movement had made great inroads into American society and into the lives of LDS women. For Latter-day Saints, the women’s liberation movement brought an awareness of long-standing societal traditions and injustices against women that LDS Church leadership acknowledged needed correction.<sup>7</sup> Part of that correction would be to call a unique woman to lead the Young Women organization.

The choice of Elaine Cannon as Young Women president can be seen as a step in a new direction in terms of Church leadership. Previous presidents had not been employed outside of the home, but Cannon had found success in her profession as a journalist and was a popular and well-liked speaker. Cannon’s life fit into the definition of fulfillment as posed by the feminists. She was an LDS woman ahead of her time, struggling with what many LDS women deal with today (2014), points out one interviewer, in that she “managed to be a full-time mom and still handle a full load of Church and employment responsibilities. She would get up at the ‘crack of dawn’ and write her daily newspaper column or the manuals of various auxiliaries, leaving” the rest of the day in which she could handle other duties—“manage, juggle, prioritize and inspire.”<sup>8</sup> As a working mother, Cannon was uneasy at the prospect that young women would use her as a role model for the new feminist agenda. She stated that her ability to juggle outside employment and a family was not something she was encouraging for others. When her professional achievements were emphasized over her motherhood, she thought it was detrimental. She recalled, “The damage that it did to other people I think is something that I ought to talk about. It reached a point where I then no longer would let anybody introduce me with anything that was my vita, my biography, my honors, my

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<sup>6</sup>Maurine Ward, *From Adam’s Rib, to Women’s Lib* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1981), 57.

<sup>7</sup>“The Church and the Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: A Moral Issue,” *Ensign* (insert into magazine), March 1980, 5.

<sup>8</sup>Maurine Jensen Proctor, “Elaine Cannon—A Tribute,” *Meridian Magazine*, April 27, 2009, <http://www.ldsmag.com/article/1/5342> (accessed March 1, 2014).

awards: 'Just forget it. I am somebody's mother.'"<sup>9</sup>

Motherhood was the role she would stress throughout her presidency because motherhood was what President Spencer W. Kimball emphasized in his teachings to LDS women. In hopes that women would evaluate their options concerning how they would value and express their femininity, President Kimball encouraged general Church leaders to reinforce womanhood, marriage, and motherhood. He emphasized that "women [were] to take care of the family" and promised them that, in that role, they would find greater satisfaction, and joy, and peace, and make greater contributions to mankind."<sup>10</sup>

Cannon wanted her role as a mother to be seen as having the utmost importance. At one time, she reflected, "I was very much the mother. I probably overcompensated in my marriage and with my children because of also having outside interests. Yet it was worth it. As a result I have a very good marriage, and might not have had if I hadn't felt rather guilty because I was doing some extra little outside thing in a period when other mothers weren't."<sup>11</sup>

Elaine Anderson and Donald James ("Jim") Cannon married on March 25, 1943, shortly after his return home from serving an LDS mission in Hawaii. Between 1944 and 1955, they had six children: James, Carla, Christine, Susan, Holly, and Tony. Jim served as bishop on three different occasions and taught seminary at South High.<sup>12</sup> He was also involved politically as a member of the Utah House of Representatives (1957–59) and ran unsuccessfully for both governor of Utah (1964) and Salt Lake City mayor (1967). Like his wife, he also

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<sup>9</sup>Elaine A. Cannon, Interviewed by Gordon Irving, [for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Historical Department, The James Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Historical Department, April 30, 1979, 24, Box 4, fd. 3, photocopies of typescript also at L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter Perry Special Collections). Irving conducted a series of interviews, including those on May 21, 1979, December 28, 1984, August 27, 1985, July 17, 1990, and August 21, 1990; cited by date and page.

<sup>10</sup>Janet Brigham, "The Nauvoo Monument to Women," *Ensign*, September 1978, 73.

<sup>11</sup>Cannon, Interview, April 30, 1979, 24.

<sup>12</sup>Holly C. Metcalf, *Love's Banner* (Kenmore, Wash.: Lamb and Lion, 2011), 107–8.

devoted some of his time to writing and worked as a staff member for *Deseret News*. As the executive director of the Utah Travel Council in the 1960s, he coined the Utah slogan “the greatest snow on earth.”<sup>13</sup>

As Young Women general president, Elaine made it very clear that the decisions she had made in her marriage and family were not necessarily the path for everyone else. She stated, “Because the young mothers were beginning to feel a certain restlessness: ‘Well, Elaine Cannon isn’t fulfilled at home. I’m not either. Well, if Elaine Cannon can do it, I can do it.’ This began to concern me. We aren’t all made alike.” Her priority, therefore, was to prepare LDS young women for the role they would play in the traditional LDS family, not in the world of work.

#### CANNON’S PREPARATION

Cannon had been prepared for this calling her entire life. Her love for the Young Women program went back to her early childhood when her mother, Minnie E. Anderson, served as a member of the YWMA general board during the Great Depression. “I had lots of experience with the Young Women when I was still very young, and Mother’s example was always such an inspiration to me,” she remembered.<sup>14</sup> Even in the Beehive program for twelve- and thirteen-year-olds, she seems to have anticipated her future role when she wrote in her journal, “I want to remember experiences that I am having at this age, so I will know how to help young women when I grow up.”<sup>15</sup>

Elaine was the second child of Aldon J. Anderson and Minnie Egan Anderson, born on April 9, 1922. She grew up in the Utah Capitol Hill neighborhood with her two brothers, Aldon Jr. and Lowell, and her sister Nadine.<sup>16</sup> Elaine’s father was employed by both the Oregon Short Line and Union Pacific railroads. She remembered him as an “extremely active man, civically [and] organizationally,

<sup>13</sup>“D. James Cannon Dies at 78,” *Deseret News*, March 6, 1998, }<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/616999/D-James-Cannon-dies-at-78.html?pg=all> (accessed March 30, 2014).

<sup>14</sup>Lynne Hollstein, “Preparation Began Early for New YW President,” *Church News*, July 22, 1978, 4.

<sup>15</sup>Qtd. in *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>Janet Peterson and LaRene Gaunt, *Keepers of the Flame* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1995), 119–20.

starting organizations for the benefit of the community, such as the Exchange Club and the Capitol Hill Improvement league . . . [and] serving in the bishopric.”<sup>17</sup> Though Minnie was not employed outside the home, she was politically active; and Elaine recalled “wonder at her mother’s constant work to improve herself, including teaching herself how to play the piano and violin and to speak French.”<sup>18</sup>

Though Minnie inculcated a love for the Young Women organization in Elaine, Minnie also instilled another characteristic in her daughter. Cannon observed that her “mother [could not] get over the fact that there [were] people coming into our city who [weren’t] white and of pioneer stock.” She was greatly troubled by this bias; and even as a young woman saw it as “narrow.” Despite her love and respect for her mother, Elaine “learned a powerful lesson from that. I knew that that wasn’t how I wanted to be about God’s children. . . . I think my mother’s prejudice . . . had a reverse effect on me, in that it opened my heart.”<sup>19</sup> This open-heartedness was just what was needed in the Young Women program at the time that it was becoming a world-wide organization. Utah Church members were being exposed to many who thought and acted differently than those who had grown up in the core LDS culture of Utah. Cannon’s own experience was broadening—assignments on the YWMIA General Board, participation in President Harry S Truman’s “Mid-Century White House Conference on Children and Youth,” and the Know Your Religion series sponsored by the Church Education System that took her across North America and Europe. Cannon’s “national experience and worldwide travel helped her understand the needs of Saints around the world, and she and her board worked to make the Young Women program something that could be adopted and understood worldwide.”<sup>20</sup>

Cannon would not only be open-hearted to people of different races and backgrounds but also with those who had differing opinions about the role of women. She came to this position of leadership with a predisposition to accept all people, including those who were wrestling with feminist issues both in and outside of the Church. Can-

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<sup>17</sup>Cannon, Interview, April 30, 1979, 4.

<sup>18</sup>Peterson and Gaunt, *Keepers of the Flame*, 121.

<sup>19</sup>Cannon, Interviews, April 30, 1979, 5; July 20, 1984, 42.

<sup>20</sup>Holly C. Metcalf, *Love’s Banner: Memories of the Life of Elaine Cannon* (Kenmore, Washington: Lion and Lamb, 2011), 197, 87, 103, and 109–110.

non observed, “This memory [of her mother’s prejudice] became a critical direction for all of my work. One doesn’t nag somebody because they live differently. One helps people because they don’t understand yet, and when they do they will be different. It’s a combination of help with the positive promise that outcome will be what it should be. And I think that’s a great dimension that I was given.”<sup>21</sup>

In addition to the teachings of her parental home, several previous experiences also equipped Cannon for her future role. Between the ages of twenty-one and fifty-six, when she was called to the presidency, Cannon had been a prolific newspaper columnist, had written numerous magazine articles including for *Seventeen* magazine, and in 1949 accepted the challenging invitation to host a local weekly television show.<sup>22</sup>

She also ran several successful businesses including *Seminar for Sallies and Sams*, a combination fashion show and charm school for teens (1948); *The Dressmaker*, a fabric store (1959), and *The Lighthouse*, a weight loss company (1970).<sup>23</sup> Along with being a successful businesswoman and writer she had also served in several general auxiliary callings including the Young Women General Board (1961–63), Church Correlation Committee (1962–65), LDS Student Association (LDSSA) Women’s Advisor (1965–73), Co-chair of the Church’s Bicentennial Celebration (1974–76), and the Church Activities General Committee (1976–78). According to her counselor, Arlene Barlow Darger, “All of this gave her a most unique preparation and foundation to step into this position. . . . She came in knowing the ropes and landed on her feet running.”<sup>24</sup>

As Cannon looked back on her presidency, she declared, “My sole purpose in being president of the Young Women was to do some pioneering and fight some battles. . . . [Change] will come out as it always appropriately should, through the edicts of the Brethren. . . . But the ‘goading and provoking to good deeds’ and so on is part of our

<sup>21</sup>Cannon, Interview, April 30, 1979, 4.

<sup>22</sup>Metcalfe, *Love’s Banner*, 86.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 77–78, 89, and 167. *Seminar for Sallies and Sams* were produced in the Intermountain West, Vancouver, Halifax, Boston, and London until 1970.

<sup>24</sup>Arlene B. Darger, interviewed by Marsha G. Richards, November 3, 2003, 2, Relief Society Building, Salt Lake City.

role, and I'm content with that." Cannon's phrasing is an interesting echo of Joseph Smith's injunction to the Nauvoo Relief Society sisters to "provoke the brethren to good works in looking after the needs of the poor."<sup>25</sup>

The battles Cannon fought began before she was even called to the position. She recorded: Beginning in April of 1978 over the course of several weeks "I was awakened in the night, time and time again, [sitting] bolt upright." She did not say she heard a voice, but she definitely knew she "was given instructions to get my life in order, and was told that I was going to be the president of the Young Women." Her immediate reaction was that the very thought was "absolutely abhorrent." She berated herself: "What am I doing thinking this? How arrogant! How could I ever be used when I've done all of this and this and this that's terrible?" She would rise from her bed, "get down on my knees and beg the Lord to forgive me for being so presumptuous as to think such a thing," only to find the feeling "still . . . with me" when she returned to bed.<sup>26</sup> Denial and rejection did not work. "Here this strong feelings [sic] would emerge." Finally, she stopped denying and started working: "I began to get my house in order, literally my house that I lived in, and my own personal life, the repenting that goes on, thinking that it wasn't going to really happen."<sup>27</sup> She "told no one about this, not even my husband."<sup>28</sup>

While Cannon was filling a "Know Your Religion" assignment in Springfield, Missouri, on May 15, 1978, the "impressions of direction" moved to a new level of urgency.<sup>29</sup> Before she spoke on Friday night, her husband called her and said, "Elaine, President Kimball's office is trying to get you. What's up?" Cannon replied, "I don't know, but I'll call tomorrow." She remembers being asleep that night for only about forty-five minutes when a voice awakened her,

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<sup>25</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 156. "A Book of Records, Containing the proceedings of The Female Relief Society of Nauvoo," *Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book*, 17 Mar. 1842, Joseph Smith Papers, <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book> (accessed March 19, 2014).

<sup>26</sup>Cannon, Interview, August 27, 1985, 154 and July 17, 1990, 158.

<sup>27</sup>Cannon, Interview, August 27, 1985, 154.

<sup>28</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 159.

<sup>29</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 182.

instructing her on issues dealing with the Young Women.<sup>30</sup> At that very moment, she began a fast. That next Monday, when she returned home, she told Jim about the “midnight” calls and called President Kimball, who asked her to come to his office immediately.<sup>31</sup> Although she knew the purpose of their meeting, she listened to him as he extended the calling. She then told him of her six weeks of sleepless nights. He was not surprised. His response was, “Sister Cannon, you are going into a very difficult period for this program, and there will be times when it will be important for you to know that it was the Lord who wanted you here and not just me.”<sup>32</sup> It was reassurance of immense power to her. Over and over again, she would return to that statement for strength, and over and over, it provided the promised strength: “It gave me comfort and courage to . . . fight within the system for a perspective that I was able to provide as a woman and as one who had been through some things in the church system so that I could make a particular contribution for a small period of time. I knew that I would not be there very long, but I knew that certain things must happen.”<sup>33</sup>

Even after accepting the calling, Cannon had a restless night as she tried to choose her counselors. A day or two later, she woke up with a name: Norma Broadbent Smith, someone she had barely known in college. Later, the name of her other counselor, Arlene Barlow Darger, also came to her. After receiving confirmation in the temple, she submitted their names for consideration. The “very difficult period” President Kimball had described was already beginning; and the setting apart of her presidency was delayed about two months, until August 1, 1978, because of some hurt feelings caused by the release of her predecessor, Ruth Hardy Funk.<sup>34</sup> As President Kimball set her apart, he blessed Cannon “with health” and also assured her that she would be guided by “visions, revelations, ideas, directions.” Then he reminded her that she was in charge of “1,000,000 young women in the Church and the approximately 2,000,000,000

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<sup>30</sup>Cannon, Interview, August 27, 1985, 155.

<sup>31</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 184.

<sup>32</sup>Cannon, Interview, August 27, 1985, 156.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1990, 159; Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 188.

<sup>34</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 185–86; Cannon, interview, July 17, 1990, 159.

young women in the world” between ages twelve and eighteen who could “receive inspiration from the activities of this organization, to the end that their lives may be changed.”<sup>35</sup> President Nathan Eldon Tanner officiated in setting apart Arlene Barlow Darger as first counselor while President Marion G. Romney set apart Norma Broadbent Smith as second counselor.

One of the issues upon which Cannon sought inspiration was the understanding that the Church’s young women needed to have about the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). This fifty-eight-word amendment, which was widely seen as symbolic of the nation’s support for the ideal of equality, had been passed by Congress in 1972 and then sent to state legislatures for ratification. Utah’s legislature rejected the amendment in 1973, and again in 1975. In 1978, the same year that Cannon was called as Young Women’s president, supporters of the bill knew that they did not have the thirty-eight state votes to ratify it by 1979 and received a time extension. Regardless, the ratification movement faltered, and the legal deadline passed in 1982, leaving the amendment a dead letter.

According to historian Martha Sonntag Bradley, supporters of the ERA saw the amendment as much-needed change with the “potential to better women’s lives, enhance their personal relationships, improve their ability to care for their children, and open doors to economic and professional opportunities.”<sup>36</sup> The ERA debate motivated American women to question the effect it would have upon the status, rights, and roles of women in an increasingly polemic series of charges, arguments, and counter-charges.<sup>37</sup> Many Latter-day Saints looked to the Church for guidance to make sense of the confusion.

In response on October 22, 1976, the First Presidency delivered its first official statement regarding the proposed amendment. In a pull-out pamphlet in the *Ensign* magazine, they declared, “There have been injustices to women before the law and in society generally. These we deplore. There are additional rights to which women are en-

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<sup>35</sup>Metcalf, *Love’s Banner*, 190.

<sup>36</sup>Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums: Utah Women, Religious Authority, and Equal Rights* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books/Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2005), 83.

<sup>37</sup>“The Church and the Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: A Moral Issue,” 1.



titled. However, we firmly believe that the Equal Rights Amendment is not the answer.”<sup>38</sup> In response to the time extension and to clarify the Church’s stance, the First Presidency issued another statement on May 25, 1978, in which they stated that “women’s rights would most successfully be guaranteed ‘individually under appropriate specific laws.’”<sup>39</sup> Even with prophetic guidance, many LDS continued to wrestle with the strongly worded arguments.

In 1977, Sonia Johnson, an active Latter-day Saint woman who had grown up in Logan and was then living in Virginia with her husband and four children, brought national attention to the Church as she and her group advocated for the ERA. In the most polarized moment of the debate, she was excommunicated in December 1979 for activities that her Church leaders deemed to be anti-Mormon. It was a painful episode, whose ripples continued to spread out, troubling many Latter-day Saints.

The ERA’s wording was simple: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.” Yet, as Bradley tells us it was precisely this basic wording that led the Church, as well as other opponents, to state that the amendment was too vague and caused the Church’s concern that passing the ERA would cause “ambiguity in the family structure.”<sup>40</sup>

Church historian J. B. Haws explains that statements made by the Church in opposition to the ERA highlighted the Church’s belief that the family is the most basic societal institution. They also demonstrated that, contrary to the feminist viewpoint, “the church’s anti-ERA stance was a response to those who sought to destabilize this family model and blur crucial distinctions between men and women, rather than a reversal on women’s issues.”<sup>41</sup>

Cannon, along with the other women auxiliary leaders, became the targets of questions and criticism about the ERA. Barbara Bradshaw Smith, called as Relief Society general president in

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<sup>38</sup>Barbara B. Smith, *A Fruitful Season* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 77.

<sup>39</sup>“First Presidency Reaffirms Opposition to ERA,” *Ensign*, October 1978, 63.

<sup>40</sup>Bradley, *Pedestals and Podiums*, 104.

<sup>41</sup>J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 90.

October 1974, had spent almost four years longer than Cannon in the crosshairs of public opinion and controversy. Smith lamented: "The media tended to pit my associates and me against the proponents of equal rights for women. It was a continuing frustration."<sup>42</sup> Smith writes in her autobiography that she was all for women's rights as the head of an organization of a million women: "With all my heart I wanted to do my part to ensure continued progress toward equality for everyone in the United States, but . . . I firmly believed that the proposed constitutional change was neither necessary nor a prudent way to accomplish the goal."<sup>43</sup>

Having these issues uppermost in her mind as well, Cannon prayed fervently and searched intently for ways to bring peace and security to the Church's young women. The inspiration that came through Cannon included four major innovations that she felt would anchor young women despite the shifts and uncertainties in society about the role of women: (1) creating a separate magazine for youth, (2) restructuring the Young Women General Board, (3) instituting Sunday instruction for Young Women, and implementing the first general LDS women's meeting.

#### *THE NEW ERA*

Though the separate youth magazine was implemented seven years before Cannon became Young Women's general president, she felt it was one of her greatest contributions to the youth of the Church. She also felt that this experience was one of the best preparations for her calling to become president of the organization.<sup>44</sup>

Preparation for implementing a Church magazine for youth came early in Cannon's life. She had started a school paper in junior high and produced a weekly paper right after high school graduation "because it made people happier and kept people together."<sup>45</sup> By the time she got to college, she was writing a column several times a week for the *Salt Lake Telegram*; and soon after marrying Jim Cannon, she

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<sup>42</sup>Cannon, Interview, May 21, 1979, 25.

<sup>43</sup>Smith, *A Fruitful Season*, 80.

<sup>44</sup>Cannon, Interview, April 30, 1979, 27.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, May 21, 1979, 25.

became society editor for the *Deseret News*.<sup>46</sup> Although the money was welcome for their growing family, Elaine would always consider how such activities could help the Church as well.<sup>47</sup>

Even the person with whom she collaborated to propose a separate magazine for LDS teens was part of her early life. Elder Marion D. Hanks of the First Quorum of the Seventy had been Cannon's beau when they were teens, and they almost married. Looking back on that relationship, she pointed out in an interview: "You never know who's going to be sitting across the table from you in a church setting, because down the road [Hanks] became editor and I the co-editor of the new church youth section (June 1960) in the *Improvement Era*. . . . All those years later we could sit across from each other and feel great understanding about the way each other's minds worked and have no regrets about our early behavior. So that has been a very powerful lesson for us to share with youth."<sup>48</sup>

Cannon felt that getting a separate youth magazine was "a very important part of my contribution to the Church."<sup>49</sup> In June 1960, she had been called to be the co-editor of a monthly youth section for the *Improvement Era*, a magazine that was first published in 1897 and became the official Church publication for adults until 1970. This insert, usually between twelve and fourteen pages, enlivened with illustrations and short, sparkling articles, was titled *Era of Youth* and concentrated on such popular themes as boy-girl relationships, truth and beauty, the importance of education, and "What think Ye of Christ?"<sup>50</sup> But Cannon was not satisfied with the insert. She was adamant that the youth of the Church needed a separate magazine. One of the reasons for Cannon's emphasis may have come from President Kimball, who expressed deep concerns about the diminished emphasis on home and family for young women:

You read the papers, you watch television, you hear the radio, you read books and magazines, and much that comes to your consciousness is designed to lead you astray. . . .

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<sup>46</sup>Hollstein, "Preparation Began Early for New YW President," 4; Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 44–46.

<sup>47</sup>Cannon, Interview, May 14, 1979, 13.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1990, 50.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1984, 100.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1984, 100, 103.

Some of the things they are telling you these days are: it is not necessary to marry; it is not necessary to marry to have children; it is not necessary to have children; you may have all the worldly pleasures without these obligations and responsibilities. There is the pill. There is abortion. There are other ways to give you this loosely held, so-called freedom.

They are telling you that you are manacled to your homes, to your husbands, to your children, to your housework. They are talking and writing to you about a freedom they know nothing about.<sup>51</sup>

Cannon saw clearly how a magazine for LDS youth—boys as well as girls—could counteract the feminist ideas so readily available in other media. She was hardly in a strong position as co-editor of an insert to apply pressure to achieve the goal, but it would not leave her alone. She concluded, “In terms of gospel principles—the worth of souls, God’s plan—we’re here to learn, and what we really must become. It’s the only reason good enough for me to spend my precious energy on. See, you just take it right down to the very gut level of the thing.” Sometime in 1970, with her own motives clear, she suggested to Elder Hanks, “You have a little clout. Couldn’t you ask that we make our *own* presentation?” Elder Hanks arranged for them to meet with Spencer W. Kimball, then president of the Twelve. Cannon fasted and prayed before making the presentation. When she was done, President Kimball “swirled his chair around from the credenza behind him where he had swallowed a pill. In the same second he threw the pill in his mouth, he beat his fist down on the desk, and he said, ‘Let’s do it. I’ll be the first to subscribe.’”<sup>52</sup> One of Cannon’s general board members remembers Elaine sharing that she was “really satisfied with her efforts on the *New Era*.”<sup>53</sup> The *New Era* was first published as a separate magazine for LDS youth in January 1971. Cannon recalled this victory in the context of personal revelation: “We need to know what we’re doing with our lives and our assignments. We need to ask the ‘why’ and then decide how we can make that ‘why’ happen,

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<sup>51</sup>Spencer W. Kimball, “The Blessings and Responsibilities of Womanhood,” *Ensign*, March 1976, 70.

<sup>52</sup>Cannon, Interview, May 21, 1979, 27.

<sup>53</sup>Marion Cahoon Searle, Interviewed by Kalli Searle, April 25, 2013, 5, Salt Lake City, transcript in my possession.

and then be willing to go after it because it's right."<sup>54</sup>

#### RESTRUCTURING THE YOUNG WOMEN GENERAL BOARD

Immediately after Cannon was called to be Young Women president in August 1978, Elder Ezra Taft Benson, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, gave her some advice. He stated that he "worried about offending the Brethren in any way or doing anything that would be injurious to the Church." By sharing his concerns, he was warning her to be equally sensitive.<sup>55</sup> Ironically, Elder Benson became one of the first people to criticize her. The reason for the criticism was Cannon's reorganization of the Young Woman board. Under the previous president, Ruth Hardy Funk had had forty-four general board members. The Young Women board had gradually become inefficient due to the sheer number of women involved. Cannon knew that restructuring the board and downsizing it was a first step in helping the board to become more effective.

Cannon had "always been very interested in organizing people and things."<sup>56</sup> She had organized a baby parade at the Utah State Fair, started back-to-school fashion shows in Salt Lake City, arranged *Deseret News* seminars, established the Church sorority Lambda Delta Sigma, and served on the first Church Correlation committee. By the time she was called as Young Women president, she concluded that "there must be something 'organizational' in my spirit."<sup>57</sup> Young Women board member Marion Cahoon Searle adds, "I see her as a very organized person, and a very high-energy person, and kind of a no-nonsense person."<sup>58</sup> Cannon admitted that she tended to be overbearing when she was younger: "I was really a pain in the neck when I was growing up, honestly. You know, how you would like to have some bright little thing saying, 'Now you sit here and you sit here and we'll do this?' In fact, I think I probably wasn't very popular. But because I was organizing things, I always had a big group of people around

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<sup>54</sup>Cannon, Interview, May 21, 1979, 27.

<sup>55</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 187.

<sup>56</sup>Cannon, Interview, May 21, 1979, 22.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>58</sup>Searle, Interview, 2.

me.”<sup>59</sup> Some parents might have seen her bossiness as negative, but Cannon grew up in “a home where all of those innate talents would be fostered.”<sup>60</sup> A member of the Young Women General Board, Mona Layton, admired this quality in Cannon: “She was very organized. She had a goal. She did everything she could to meet the goal successfully.”<sup>61</sup> This quality of organization and her early experiences in leading others prepared Cannon for her general Church calling.

When Cannon was called to be president of the Young Women organization, “the Brethren wanted a clean sweep.” President Kimball told her: “We want the whole thing to be new. Don’t carry on with the old.” As Cannon later summarized, he advised “new counselors, new board, new approach.”<sup>62</sup> Many had thought when Cannon was called that she would not do anything different from previous administrations. She reflected that when some had said, “‘Oh, let’s get Elaine Cannon in there,’ [they] thought they would go back to the old Mutual days. . . . ‘That’s what she’ll do for us. We’ll have the old days back.’” Cannon was also concerned that, because she had a “reputation of being a fun-and-games person,” LDS members would not take her leadership seriously.<sup>63</sup> After Kimball’s instruction to make “the whole thing new,” Cannon did not go “back to the old Mutual ways” at all. Not only was she serious about her calling but she also knew that there was serious opposition both in and outside of the Church to her vision of the LDS Young Women.

Cannon explained the situation as she saw it: “The feminists were in full bloom. . . . Now what were we as a church finally going to do about it?”<sup>64</sup> One of the things that the Church “was going to do about it” was to have Elaine Cannon and the other women auxiliary leaders become Church spokespersons about the role of women. In an interview with the *Church News*, Cannon explained the role she envisioned for each young LDS woman:

A young woman in the Church, with a life sweetened by gospel

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<sup>59</sup>Cannon, Interview, May 21, 1979, 28.

<sup>60</sup>Mona S. Layton, Interviewed by Kalli Searle, March 25, 2013, 4, Salt Lake City, transcript in my possession.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>62</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 161.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, May 21, 1979, 32.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, July 17, 1990, 161.

experiences, enlightened by religious training, strengthened by the ordinances and directions of the holy priesthood of God, is bound to have a different view of her own role as a woman. No matter how liberal or emancipated or sophisticated she . . . is, deep down her own feelings must convince her that she is a cherished child of God. She is the recipient, with other children both male and female, of all the blessings of a plan of eternal life.

The gospel of Jesus Christ provides freedom of spirit and choice vastly more meaningful than anything radical feminists' attitudes can offer.<sup>65</sup>

Cannon was determined to surround herself with board members who would bring that same message to the young women of the Church.

During the sleepless night on May 15, 1978, one of the strong feelings that came to her was the distinct instruction that her new board members should be the mothers of teenage daughters.<sup>66</sup> She was also impressed to greatly reduce the number of board members. When Cannon had previously served on the YWMIA board (1961–63), upwards of a hundred women had served in that capacity. Cannon “wanted to have a small board for a scaled-down program and closer control on our focus.”<sup>67</sup> She decided on twelve because it was also the number of the twelve apostles, which would remind board members they were serving in the Church, and all of them had teenage daughters. She explains other qualities of the new board members: “We chose women who were attractive. We chose women who could be polished more. We chose women who had spiritual leanings, not intellectual bravado. They didn’t have to be geniuses at curriculum.”<sup>68</sup>

These women called to Cannon’s board would represent what Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve had specified,

<sup>65</sup>Metcalf, *Love’s Banner*, 225–26.

<sup>66</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 164–65.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid. Elaine Cannon’s original General Young Women’s Board included: Mary Woolston Briggs, Margery Sorenson Cannon, Winnifred Cannon Jardine, Mona Snelgrove Layton, Sharon Rich Lewis, Janet Green Booth Palmer, Grethe Ballif Peterson, Sue Louise Clawson Smith, Allie Jeanene Moss Stringham, Katherine Romney Warner, and Patricia Lunt Weed.

speaking in October general conference about two months after Cannon was called:

We need women who will applaud decency and quality in everything from the fashion of clothing to crucial social issues. We need women who are organized and women who can organize. We need women with executive ability who can plan and direct and administer; women who can teach, women who can speak out. There is a great need for women who can receive inspiration to guide them personally in their teaching and in their leadership responsibilities. We need women with the gift of discernment who can view the trends in the world and detect those that, however popular, are shallow or dangerous. We need women who can discern those positions that may not be popular at all, but are right.<sup>69</sup>

He was speaking of the Relief Society, not the Young Women, but Cannon immediately saw how the qualities that Elder Packer wanted the Church's adult women to possess needed to start by setting the Church's Young Women on the right path. Cannon was determined that her board would deal with critical issues, so when she made her announcement she declared, "We hope to help our board become proficient and perceptive in dealing with special needs of all kinds of young women who are facing a variety of problems in today's world."<sup>70</sup> Elaine carefully chose board members with specific characteristics and needs in mind. For instance, Grethe Ballif Peterson tells us she was the only self-proclaimed feminist on the board. Peterson had also been the managing editor of *Exponent II*, a publication started in 1974 by several women in the Cambridge, Massachusetts, area who focused on the concerns and experiences of some Mormon women from a feminist perspective. In this position, she had experience with LDS women who were thinking seriously about the ERA and related issues. This experience became invaluable to the board.<sup>71</sup>

Cannon's announcement of her new general board also included the news that each new board member "has an unmarried

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<sup>69</sup>Boyd K. Packer, "The Relief Society," *Ensign*, November 1978, 7.

<sup>70</sup>Hollstein, "Preparation Began Early for New YW President," 4.

<sup>71</sup>Grethe Ballif Peterson, Interviewed by Mary Jane Woodger, March 21, 2014, 1, Salt Lake City, transcript in my possession.



daughter who will serve in an advisory role.”<sup>72</sup> Cannon felt she had been inspired to choose women who had “a daughter of the right age” at home; but when the announcement came out in the *Church News*, Cannon had been misquoted, and the headline was “New Board Calls Mothers and Daughters to Serve.” Cannon had not yet seen it when she received a heated personal phone call from Ezra Taft Benson. According to Elaine’s daughter-biographer: “As they spoke, Elaine came to understand why he was outraged at such an idea. As she explained: “Teenage girls are still at a time in their lives when they may, because of their youth, make serious mistakes. If they were called and set apart as General Board members, the discipline appropriate to that station would be more harsh than would normally be the lot for a teenage girl. President Benson had a valid concern and Elaine understood his position and would abide by it.”<sup>73</sup> She assured him that the girls would not serve in any official capacity.

Despite the confusion in the changes, board member Jeanine Stringham recalls a much smoother arrangement in practice. Her daughter served on “an ad hoc committee” that acted as “an advisory committee to the board.” The girls “met with us several times as a board,” but not within their own group. They “were allowed to go on speaking assignments with us, if we felt that they would . . . do a good job, and were needed, and could contribute,” but they did not travel with women other than their mothers, nor did they attend all of the meetings that their mothers did.<sup>74</sup>

As a former businesswoman, Cannon structured the board meetings like corporate board meetings. In previous callings, she had chafed at board meetings that were “a waste of time” with “inexperienced” members who would “talk about the decorations for three hours. That bores me to this day.” The situation frustrated her: “I was already a professional person, and here I was sitting with a bunch of housewives who always have bothered me with their lack of ability to tackle a problem and deal with it. It just took them forever. . . . I’m a

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<sup>72</sup>“Young Women Forms New Board,” *Church News*, October 28, 1978, 7.

<sup>73</sup>Metcalfe, *Love’s Banner*, 188.

<sup>74</sup>Jeanine Stringham, Interviewed by Mary Jane Woodger, February 5, 2013, Bountiful, Utah, 3, transcript in my possession.

get-to-the-critical-thing-and-do-it person.”<sup>75</sup>

Part of every board meeting was devoted to training by “General Authorities, communication experts, women’s issues experts, and so on,” with the result that her board members “were trained in communication skills, in personal grooming, in problem solving and some basic counseling skills, so they wouldn’t go out and think they could counsel more than they could and let it go to their head.”<sup>76</sup> The first half of each training session was devoted to spiritual study, because “effective leaders who know and live the gospel can reach each girl more effectively.”<sup>77</sup>

With this approach, the Young Women General Board became a force in carrying out Cannon’s vision in strengthening the Church’s Young Women against hostile aspects of feminism. During Elaine’s presidency, the dialogue became even pricklier, in some cases degenerating into slogans shouted across the barriers but with very little genuine dialogue. Some women, including Latter-day Saints and former Church members, protested in public places, including chaining themselves to the gates of the Seattle Temple, then under construction, and giving interviews with such national talk-show hosts as Phil Donahue. It was a challenging time to be a woman and a leader in the Church. To stay focused during this controversy, Cannon asked Young Women General Board members to keep the feminists in their own prayers and in the prayers at the board meetings.<sup>78</sup>

Board members were also assigned a certain regional area of the Church, in which they would teach local leaders what they had learned under Cannon’s direction.<sup>79</sup> These assignments were quite different from those of previous Young Women boards who had previously been organized by the main classes: Beehive, Mia Maid, or Laurel committees. Now, in addition to their geographical assign-

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<sup>75</sup>Cannon, Interview, December 28, 1984, 110.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1990, 165.

<sup>77</sup>Jan Hemming, “Young Women: ‘Build, Share,’” *Church News*, May 5, 1979, 6.

<sup>78</sup>Metcalf, *Love’s Banner*, 225.

<sup>79</sup>Arlene B. Darger and Norma B. Smith, Interviewed by Annette C. Burgess, November 3, 2003, 3–4, Salt Lake City, transcript in my possession.

ment, they also had areas of concerns: personal testimony, missionary work, genealogy, etc.<sup>80</sup> This restructuring of the Young Women General Board can be seen as one of Cannon's greatest successes in dealing with the issues of the day that young women confronted.<sup>81</sup>

### SUNDAY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG WOMEN

One of Cannon's most important innovations was implementing Sunday instruction for Young Women. Cannon was called as general president during the height of the feminist movement. She perceived it as "brilliantly presented" and as comprising "all the aspects of girls' lives—movies, clothes, press, etc. No longer was there a single voice saying that a woman behaves this way, thinks this way, does this, and so on. There were just so many strident voices out there that it was often very unhealthy."<sup>82</sup>

These changes in societal values caused the young women to have a lower attendance rate and participation percentage than the young men. Cannon immediately felt that her purpose "was to give a place and an identity to the young women."<sup>83</sup> The problem of identity was critical for Young Women, and Cannon stretched to find a way to "reach those girls and help their self-esteem."<sup>84</sup> She felt that the solution was to provide spiritual instruction to Young Women on Sundays.

Teenage boys had long been meeting in Sunday Aaronic Priesthood meetings at the same time as their fathers, but nothing parallel existed for teenage girls. Thus, the weight of tradition was against such an innovation. As Cannon contemplated how to introduce such a new idea, a great advantage was her well-developed skill in working with men and honoring their priesthood authority. This characteristic was cultivated early in the Anderson home. Cannon recalled in an interview before the end of her first full year as president: "It was my father who gave me that easy acceptance of the male role. . . . My relationship with my father has had a positive influence on how I feel about men and the work of men. This has

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<sup>80</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 169.

<sup>81</sup>Stringham, Interview, February 5, 2013, 11.

<sup>82</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 161.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 164.



*A lively and popular speaker, Elaine Cannon addressed thousands in audiences around the world in her various roles. Photo courtesy of Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.*

helped me as I work as a woman in the male-dominated setting at Church headquarters. If I lose a round, I don't resent it. I just assume that I didn't explain things well enough. I think this is an advantage, because I don't have any hang-ups about it, and I see women around me who do."<sup>85</sup>

As early as 1962 when she was serving on the Correlation Committee, Cannon had recommended that the Young Women program include Sunday instruction parallel to that received by teenage boys. She wanted to "teach them something on Sunday about the gospel . . . not just doodaddie stuff. My suggestion was not received well." Florence S. Jacobsen, Margaret Romney Jackson Judd, and Dorothy Porter Holt—who were serving both as the Young Women's Presidency and also on the Youth Correlation Committee—felt that Sunday instruction for Young Women "was 'out of line.' They insisted that the girls were already getting wonderful lessons during the week. So it was an idea that did not receive their support. But it was part of my blessed perspective of what I fought for when I became Young Women president."<sup>86</sup>

In doing so, Cannon employed the lessons from her childhood home, where she was "never permitted to be critical of Church leadership."<sup>87</sup> Her mother also taught her that there were certain behaviors appropriate for a proper woman and that "being too assertive was tasteless for a woman."<sup>88</sup> Attuned to these traditional gender differences, Cannon positioned herself to take advantage of them:

I deliberately understate myself in a talk. It's very hard for me to use the words that I know, to give a formal academic presentation. . . . I've figured out that I do it because that isn't the way a "proper woman" acts. It's too masculine. I know that that's the root of it. . . . I don't want to sound authoritarian. I'm sure there has to be a way out, so that I don't look like a non-brain, on the one hand, or an assertive woman on the other. I really believe in the system of male and female role images, because of my background.<sup>89</sup>

Because of this background and orientation, she chose a "style"

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<sup>85</sup>Cannon, Interview, April 30, 1979, 2–3.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1984, 111–12.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., April 30, 1979, 4.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

of “dealings with the Brethren over the many, many years, . . . as a woman, not as an equal.”<sup>90</sup> She explained that “women historically in the Church had done the work and jabbed at the men and the men had been good sports and worked at their job, doing their leadership thing, but women essentially ran it behind the scenes. This was not what was happening now. I knew that I, who love men, was to work alone to get our women straightened up and let the men take care of themselves. So Sunday spiritual instruction for young women was our push, even before the consolidated schedule was introduced.”<sup>91</sup>

Metcalf explained, “Part of her mission, she believed, would be to give an identity and a place to the young women of the Church that reflected the equal value the Lord places on both His young men and young women.”<sup>92</sup> She expected, encountered, and refused to become embittered by the resistance to her arguments in favor of Sunday instruction. She strongly felt that strengthening young women’s divine identity would be achieved through Sunday spiritual instruction. Board member Marian Searle observed that Cannon was “diplomatic. . . . She knew how to say things and not get in trouble or offend anybody.”<sup>93</sup> Interviewed in 1990, six years after her tenure as president, Cannon observed: “This is what I feel is interesting for the record: Things do not always come easy to the system, even if somebody is inspired. We have to educate, we have to warm hearts, and we have to get others on the same wavelength.”<sup>94</sup> Because she knew it was right, Cannon was absolutely “tenacious in seeing that Sunday instruction for the Young Women [be] a part of the Consolidated Meeting Schedule.”<sup>95</sup>

That was her approach as she worked for Sunday instruction. Her counselor in the presidency, Arlene Darger, relates their experience: “As we visited outlying areas, we discovered that in many cases the Young Women’s lesson would be cut short so that they could join the Young Men for the activity. And so they were not getting the spiritual training and feeding that the Young Men were getting in the

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., December 28, 1984, 110.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., July 17, 1990, 169–70.

<sup>92</sup>Metcalf, *Love’s Banner*, 195.

<sup>93</sup>Searle, Interview, 5.

<sup>94</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 177.

<sup>95</sup>Metcalf, *Love’s Banner*, 200–201.

priesthood quorums, and so this was Sister Cannon's greatest concern."<sup>96</sup> Metcalf concurs:

When Mutual was held, quite often the Young Men would be doing Scouting activities, or some other fun activity, while the Young Women sat in their classes, distracted by the noise of bouncing basketballs down the hall. This was something Elaine wanted to address. As Elaine began to travel the world as General President, she often asked the Stake Presidencies what they thought about having Sunday instruction for the Young Women (similar to what the boys were getting in priesthood). Bolstered by the positive response to the idea she felt was inspired, she spoke of this to Church leadership. With permission then, a few stakes even piloted this idea with great success. All of this was happening as the Church was considering what was called the Consolidated Meeting Schedule.<sup>97</sup>

In this schedule, all meetings were held in one three-hour block on Sunday, a program that was implemented Churchwide by May 4, 1980. It was supplemented by a quarterly activity day for Primary children and a weekly activity/service evening for the Young Women and the Young Men.

A crucial meeting occurred on September 1, 1979, that succeeded largely because of Cannon's well-honed skills in working with priesthood leaders. In her journal, she recorded:

I felt highly prompted to drop in at the First Presidency Meeting. . . . I told Art Haycock [First Presidency Secretary] that I knew the First Presidency was to consider the consolidated meeting schedule at their morning mtg. I wanted to emphasize that whether they approved the "package" or not I had to get Sunday instruction for the Young Women. I had to save these girls. This is a necessary step. Then I had spoken with Ted Tuttle [of the First Quorum of the Seventy] and Dave Haight [of the Twelve] and said my piece. Earlier I'd talked with President Benson [president of the Quorum of the Twelve] of course. I came on up here. . . . The idea of consolidated meetings on Sunday has been approved by the First Presidency. We are all excited, of course. It is a momentous move! It will change all of our lives. . . . I had prayed peacefully at Presidency meeting Wednesday and left it all up to the

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<sup>96</sup>Darger and Smith, Interview, 3.

<sup>97</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 200–201.

Lord. So it turned out fine.<sup>98</sup>

Because the Sunday meetings, including the Young Women's meeting, was to have a spiritual focus, new manuals with an emphasis on gospel principles were written by the Curriculum Committee. They were designed to help girls gain personal testimonies, study the scriptures, share the gospel, and prepare for the temple.<sup>99</sup> In typical fashion, Cannon said: "Everything that came to me was from the Lord. Nobody knows that better than I. But I was the spokesperson. When we were discussing consolidation and we sat in on those meetings, I said, 'Let's have a joint meeting and have the women meet together, as the men meet together, for just those few minutes.' And it was all voted and agreed and settled upon."<sup>100</sup>

The new program was based on teaching the gospel to the girls and showing them how to apply it in their lives. Cannon explained: "We teach truths during the Sunday Young Women meeting. Then out of that lesson, we plan certain experiences, either vicariously or literally, to validate our teaching."<sup>101</sup>

Cannon believed that Sunday instruction would "produce a generation of women who know the gospel and who will know how to rear little boys to be proper priesthood holders in a world that will need them."<sup>102</sup>

### GENERAL YOUNG WOMEN'S MEETINGS

During this tumultuous time, Cannon realized that women leaders of the Church needed more visibility. President Kimball called Elaine Cannon and Barbara B. Smith, and asked: "What can we do for the women of the Church? For their self-esteem and to know their value to us?" Cannon replied, "I think it might help if they knew there were some leaders of women in the

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<sup>98</sup>Elaine Anderson Cannon, Journal, September 1, 1979, Perry Special Collections.

<sup>99</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 201–2.

<sup>100</sup>Cannon Interview, July 17, 1990, 175.

<sup>101</sup>Ensign Staff, "A Conversation with Elaine Cannon, Young Women's President," *Ensign*, April 1984, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1984/04/news-of-the-church/a-conversation-with-elaine-cannon-young-womens-president?lang=eng> (accessed March 31, 2014).

<sup>102</sup>Cannon, Interview, December 28, 1984, 111–12.



Church.”<sup>103</sup> Cannon was determined to get women on the rostrum during general conference. Beginning in April 1980, presidencies of the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary were seated on the stand right in the front of the priesthood section. Cannon was nervous about putting women physically in front of the priesthood, so, on Young Women presidency stationery, she wrote a note to “the Brethren” (the Young Women had been assigned to Seventy Dean L. Larsen as their advisor) suggesting that these presidencies could be seated “up on the stand over to the side again, where we would be visible and honored and all of those lovely things, but not in front of the priesthood.” In response “I received a little spanking by mail to the effect that when they wanted my advice on something like that, they would ask for it.”<sup>104</sup> The women were seated, as originally planned, on the stand in front of the General Authorities’ seating.

Placing women on the rostrum at general conference had a Church-wide influence. As Cannon recalls, “It was an interesting thing how much the priesthood in the field wanted to find ways to make their sisters visible. So they looked to the general set-up for patterns to follow in their stake conference meetings and so on.”<sup>105</sup> Norma B. Smith, a counselor in the General Young Women’s Presidency recalled: “We’d sit there and hold hands and say, ‘How did we get here, with all these General Authorities?’ But it did change things. . . . That’s a real triumph for our women everywhere.”<sup>106</sup> While feminists were gaining visibility in the media, Cannon triumphed in making LDS female leaders more visible at general conference.

It was also in October 1978 that Elaine Cannon and Barbara B. Smith began to speak in general conference. Cannon was one of the first women in forty years to speak in general conference.<sup>107</sup> In these conference addresses, Cannon broached the subject of feminism and the place of women in the Church. At a conference in 1979, skillfully

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<sup>103</sup>Norma B. Smith, Interviewed by Elaine S. Dalton, November 3, 2005, 3, Salt Lake City, transcript in my possession.

<sup>104</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 193.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>106</sup>Norma Smith, Interview, 3.

<sup>107</sup>The precedent of women speaking in general conference was set

using a lighthearted tone, she acknowledged the commotion that had surrounded her presidency: “For some time now there has been an enormous fuss made about women, some of it made by women in honor of themselves. Now I’m not sure that girls are any safer on the streets or women any happier in their lives or any of us more effective in our service—or even better-looking—because of all this furor, but it has been an interesting season.”<sup>108</sup>

Moving on from this warm-up beginning, she counseled: “A woman doesn’t have to stay in the house to be in the home. Neither does a woman need to leave her home to extend her influence to others. We will, however, be more effective on our errand if we have studied the gospel, developed our skills, and reached up and beyond our own first associations.”<sup>109</sup>

In addition to speaking in general conference, Cannon and Smith traveled with President Kimball to area conferences around the

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with what the *Times and Seasons* called the first general conference in 1845, when Lucy Mack Smith spoke in the Nauvoo Temple. After the Saints came west, the third General Relief Society President Zina D. H. Young spoke in general conference on October 8, 1879. The next time a woman spoke in general conference was in the 1929 October conference when Louise Yates Robison, Ruth May Fox, and May Anderson were called upon to speak as presidents of the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary. These three women also spoke at the two following conferences held in 1930. Sixteen years later, General Relief Society President Belle Smith Spafford spoke in the priesthood session of general conference in April 1946. There were no female speakers in general conference for another thirty years. Then from October 1976 to October 1978, General Relief Society President Barbara B. Smith spoke biannually in the Welfare Meeting of General Conference, but not in the regular conference sessions. J. Johnson, “We Shall Now Call on Some of Our Sisters”: LDS Women and General Conference Participation,” *Juvenile Instructor: Organ for Young Latter-day Saint Scholars*, March 14, 2013, <http://www.juvenileinstructor.org/we-shall-now-call-on-some-of-our-sisters-lds-women-and-general-conference-participation> (accessed March 25, 2014).

<sup>108</sup>Elaine Cannon, “Our Mighty Errand,” *Ensign*, November 1979, 106.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*

world, thus giving the female leaders even greater visibility.<sup>110</sup> While she was at these area conferences, Cannon recalled, “The idea occurred to me that if the men were meeting together for priesthood meeting out there, why in the world couldn’t we do this for the women too?”<sup>111</sup> According to Elaine’s daughter-biographer, “soon after her call to the Young Women, Elaine began pushing on an idea. She wanted the women of the Church to gather for a fireside similar to General Priesthood session.”<sup>112</sup> Ideas included holding it on the Friday night before conference or two hours before the priesthood session so that women could be “included as part of the Church. Those things did not happen, for whatever reasons seemed important to the Brethren. Conference was a priesthood event, after all, and not a people conference.”<sup>113</sup>

However, another form of meeting for Young Women was already in the planning stages when Cannon took over in August 1978. According to Cannon, Ruth Funk and her Young Women’s board had planned for a “special meeting,” to be held in the fall of 1978 for Young Women and their leaders. Though Cannon was not sustained until that 1978 October general conference she explained that “when she got hold of it,” after being set apart “she extended Funk the courtesy of speaking at the meeting, but she changed the format and rationale behind it.” It was “the Young Women [who] hosted it and fought it through and did all the work.”<sup>114</sup> Cannon insisted that the Primary and Relief Society participate in the meeting also. She felt it was very important that all three auxiliaries be in-

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<sup>110</sup>The first area conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was held in Manchester, England, in 1971. Thereafter, one area conference was held each year for the next three years. Then, starting in 1975, several were held each year with the zenith being in 1979 with nine area conferences. Since then conferences covering large areas have continued in various formats. At times, these meetings have been called multi-regional; covering large populations; on other occasions, they are carried by satellite television into various church buildings.

<sup>111</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 182.

<sup>112</sup>Metcalfe, *Love’s Banner*, 202.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 182.

cluded, and they were on September 16, 1978.<sup>115</sup> Under Cannon's direction for the first time in the history of the Church, a meeting was held for all females over the age of ten and was broadcast by closed-circuit audio to more than fourteen centers in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—uniting the officers, teachers, and members of the Young Women, Relief Society, and Primary. Now, like priesthood holders, women of the Church would be able to receive counsel, comfort, and praise from Church leaders, directed to them alone.<sup>116</sup> Cannon identified the significance of the event: “We mark this moment as the beginning—at last—of a unique unification of all the sisters of the Church, and we are focusing on proper priorities instead of personal preferences or even programs. We see it as a significant developing of all of us under the mantle of the mouthpiece of the Lord.”<sup>117</sup>

Cannon's original vision was to have the combined meeting twice each year, like the semi-annual Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood general sessions during the same weekend as general conference. She tried for a few years to include the meeting in that format but finally gave up.<sup>118</sup> Cannon and Barbara B. Smith disagreed on who should participate in these meetings and so the decision of who would attend the general meetings went back and forth each year. As Cannon informs, Smith “had a strong picture of the Relief Society and that the Primary general presidency didn't need to participate in things, because they took care of children and the mothers of these children were cared for by the Relief Society already.”<sup>119</sup> Though the format and attendees of the meetings varied during her administration, Cannon's efforts did bring about a new tradition of having some kind of a general meeting for Young Women annually during her years of service as follows:

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<sup>115</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 191.

<sup>116</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 202–3.

<sup>117</sup>Elaine A. Cannon, “If We Want to Go Up, We Have to Get On,” *Ensign*, November 1978, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1978/10/if-we-want-to-go-up-we-have-to-get-on?lang=eng> (accessed March 30, 2014).

<sup>118</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 191.

<sup>119</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.

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September 16, 1978	General Women's Meeting for 10-older
September 15, 1979	General Women's Meeting for 12-older
March 22, 1980	General Young Women's Meeting for 12-18
September 27, 1981	General Women's Meeting for 12-older.
March 28, 1981	General Young Women's Meeting for 12-18
March 27, 1982	General Women's Meeting for 12-older
September 24, 1983	General Women's Meeting for 10-older

At the second general women's meeting in 1979, Cannon earnestly testified: "Personal opinions may vary. Eternal principles never do. When the prophet speaks, sisters, the debate is over."<sup>120</sup> In the context of the furor over feminism and the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, this declaration caused quite a stir both in and outside of the Church. Those who criticized Cannon claimed that she was asking for blind obedience. However, the "principle, as Elaine believed and taught it, was that one should follow the prophet because of a fervent belief, borne of experience, that the Prophet would not lead anyone astray," commented Metcalf. "Her testimony and experience were sure in that thing. So while she took a lashing from critics, she remained confident in the truth of her statement."<sup>121</sup> President Kimball called Cannon the next Monday morning, recognized her faithful intentions, complimented her on her talk, and then asked her not to repeat the message: "When the prophet speaks, the debate is over." He knew how easily it could be misinterpreted and what kind of backlash it could cause. President Kimball wished it to be clear that Church members were not only allowed but encouraged to determine the truth of a prophet's words for themselves through prayer and faith.<sup>122</sup>

Cannon did not resent this gentle chastisement but could not help feeling vindicated a year later when President Nathan Eldon Tanner, President Kimball's counselor in the First Presidency, quoted her in his First Presidency Message: "Recently, at the Church wide fireside meeting held for the women of the Church, Young Women President Elaine Cannon made the following statement: 'When the Prophet speaks . . . the debate is over.' I was impressed by that simple state-

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<sup>120</sup>Cannon, "If We Want to Go Up, We Have to Get On."

<sup>121</sup>Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 204.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*; Cannon, Interview, August 21, 1990, 200-201.

ment, which carries such deep spiritual meaning for all of us.”<sup>123</sup>

Cannon felt that, to reinforce the annual women’s meetings, the three women’s auxiliaries needed to be more connected, demonstrating a sisterhood among the leaders. Radical feminists had sought ways to create a sisterhood within America that separated them from men.<sup>124</sup> She commented, “I was inspired to bring the women officers of the Church together before all the women of the Church and to meet regularly for special planning, such as we did for the 1980 sesquicentennial of the Church events that were held especially for women and girls of all ages. It is now standard procedure to operate that way, but we had a mighty battle to get it started.”<sup>125</sup> Speaking of sisterhood, she once said from the Tabernacle pulpit, “The sweep of our sisterhood touches me as I talk from Temple Square across the English-speaking world to you women who love the Lord and who have gathered together to learn more about him and his will for us as women.”<sup>126</sup>

Cannon was creating unity, starting with the women general officers. The premise for more interaction between the auxiliary leaders took place at a planning meeting for the sesquicentennial when Cannon suggested that the Primary general presidency should be included because its officers and teachers were women. (Within a few years, thanks to the block plan, men frequently joined the Primary staff as teachers.) Relief Society President Barbara B. Smith felt strongly that Primary leaders not be included Cannon relates, “I suppose if the Young Women hadn’t had the idea and set the stage with the first women’s meeting and accompanying reception and festivities at headquarters as a pattern for the stakes, we’d not have been invited to be a part of the planning committee [either].” They went back and forth at this planning meeting, but Smith would not give in. Finally, Elder Dean L. Larsen, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy who was the auxiliaries’ liaison and who was presiding over

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<sup>123</sup>N. Eldon Tanner, “The Debate Is Over,” *Ensign*, August 1979, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1979/08/the-debate-is-over?lang=eng> (accessed March 13, 2014).

<sup>124</sup>Bolden, *33 Things Every Girl Should Know about Women’s History*, 164.

<sup>125</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 177.

<sup>126</sup>Cannon, “Our Mighty Errand,” 106.

the meeting, simply telephoned Dwan Young, the Primary general president, and asked her to come immediately to the meeting. Thereafter, the three presidents “presented a united front and met in council regularly with [their] respective counselors.” Cannon remembered that meeting as a historic moment with huge ramifications; from that time on, the female auxiliaries leaders worked together as never before.<sup>127</sup>

Cannon envisioned that the best way to work together would be to have all of the women’s auxiliary offices in the same building. When she was first sustained, she thought it was only logical that her office be housed in the Relief Society building. She asked Elder Larsen, “Why don’t I just have a space down in the basement of the Relief Society building?” Cannon said he would not hear of it and responded that, if she was in the same building, “Barbara Smith will eat you up!” Cannon replied, “No, Barbara Smith isn’t going to eat me up.” The decision was made that the timing was not right for Young Women to move into the Relief Society building. Cannon later admitted, “As it turned out, they we’re right. We had a lot of spade-work to do, other than presenting a unified front of women leaders by officing [sic] in the same area.”<sup>128</sup>

Even though their offices were not in the same building Cannon found other ways to work with the other two auxiliaries. One such example was “a nearly month-long ‘Tribute to Women: The Legacy—Remembered and Renewed,’ sponsored by the Primary, Young Women, and Relief Society. Some 5,000 attended the meeting in the Tabernacle while countless others watched a live television broadcast or satellite transmissions. Videotapes of the meeting [were] distributed to units throughout the Church.”<sup>129</sup> This presentation gave recognition to LDS women worldwide.

Another example of all three presidencies working together took place on August 23, 1982, when the presidencies held a joint meeting and “determined to fast and pray and go to the temple as three General Boards in behalf of Women’s needs.” During the meeting, Cannon raised some concerns about their “channels of operation and communication at headquarters.” Where before,

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<sup>127</sup>Cannon, Interview, July 17, 1990, 177.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>129</sup>Gerry Avant, “Tribute to Women: Unique Legacy,” *Church News*, April 3, 1982, 6.

women leaders worked with prophets and apostles, the women leaders were now assigned to work with members of the Seventy. Cannon “was not alone in her concern that the needs of women were not getting proper attention up the ranks, that there was no ‘women perspective.’” About this issue, Cannon remarked: “In a church heavily populated with women and in a day when problems of women are acute, it is poor structure. It isn’t that the brethren don’t care; it is that in their efforts to be efficient, etc., they have outlined procedures that end up short-changing women. We sisters have to do something.” After this meeting, in which the auxiliary presidencies exercised their combined faith and “the powers of Heaven were called upon,” gradual changes came about in the Church which gave women more autonomy and voice in council meetings.<sup>130</sup>

#### RELEASE AND CONCLUSION

From the outset, Cannon had not expected to be in the position of Young Women president very long. Her expectation was to serve perhaps three years, and she had alerted her board that they would serve shorter terms than those of previous boards. So by the end of six years, she was ready for her release. She had even talked with President Gordon B. Hinckley and members of the Twelve about her release long before it came. In the fall of 1983, Cannon traveled to Europe with Dwan Young and to Brazil with Barbara B. Smith, “a very difficult, demanding, frightening, rewarding trip.” Working and traveling together, the three had become very close, thus solidifying the cooperation and sisterhood of the auxiliaries.<sup>131</sup>

By the close of her presidency, Cannon had made great strides. The *New Era* was successfully being published and the Young Women board was reorganized and working well. LDS Young Women had been recognized both among members and in broader society as never before. The presidencies shared the rostrum with their leaders at semi-annual general conferences. With all of these accomplishments, Cannon had not been able to achieve one goal: the same pattern of instruction for girls and women that existed for

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<sup>130</sup>Metcalf, *Love’s Banner*, 227.

<sup>131</sup>Cannon, Interview, August 27, 1985, 156.



boys and men.<sup>132</sup> Metcalf explains, “It was her desire to have the women of the Church, beginning as young women, connect with the identity of Womanhood, just as young men and adult men connect with the identity of Priesthood. Elaine believed that both of those identities included responsibilities and God-given gifts. Each required preparation, service, and love unfeigned. Each had specific roles and duties, as well as much in common. Her goal as the Young Women leader for the Church was to help establish that identity and programs to support it.”<sup>133</sup>

Despite this disappointment, Cannon was able to greatly improve the Young Women program of the Church as she combatted shifting values in a rapidly changing society. In a book Cannon co-authored after her presidency, Cannon reiterates: “We may not be able to change society in one generation, but we can change ourselves. Then we can work on our families, moving forward steadily, coping with challenges. And we will be filled.”<sup>134</sup> Cannon may not have changed the entire world; but through her innovation, inspiration, and implementation, she helped the women leaders of the Church gain recognition and changed the lives of countless young women.<sup>135</sup> While the feminists promised a richer life through self-fulfillment, Cannon’s theme was to help young women “to achieve a more abundant life,” by “going beyond themselves,” and finding ways to “contribute to society.”<sup>136</sup> She said:

I have a rather personal dream about our young women. My dream is to see a generation of young women who are lovingly reaching out to all who need them—to their peers who are in trouble, to their companions in life who hold the priesthood, to the world’s small children. Wouldn’t that be wonderful? Instead of the two thousand sons of

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<sup>132</sup>Holly Cannon Metcalf, Comments during Q&A portion of Mary Jane Woodger, “The Innovations, Inspirations, and Implementations of Elaine Anderson Cannon on LDS Church Organizations,” Mormon History Association, Annual Conference, Layton, Utah, June 8, 2013, notes in my possession.

<sup>133</sup>Metcalf, *Love’s Banner*, 195.

<sup>134</sup>Elaine Cannon and Ed J. Pinegar, *The Mighty Change* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 4.

<sup>135</sup>Layton, Interview, 4.

<sup>136</sup>Hollstein, “Preparation Began Early for New YW President,” 4.

Helaman, we could have five million daughters of God who see to it that love prevails, that goodness and purity reign on the earth. What a glorious world this would be! I believe that today's young women have just this potential.<sup>137</sup>

During Cannon's administration, LDS young women learned to change themselves, to grow, to serve, to prepare for life's challenges, and to eventually experience joy as faithful LDS women.

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<sup>137</sup>Cannon, qtd. in Metcalf, *Love's Banner*, 196–97.

# SONIA'S AWAKENING: WHITE MORMON EXPATRIATES IN AFRICA AND THE DISMANTLING OF MORMONISM'S RACIAL CONSENSUS, 1852–1978

*Russell W. Stevenson*

SONIA HARRIS JOHNSON, WHO GREW UP in Cache Valley, knew that most of her family harbored racist sentiments. While Johnson knew how to push back when she sensed falsehood, she had never been much of an activist. Rather, her years as a young woman were absorbed in her marriage and her loving family of origin. In 1960, she married Richard Johnson, a brilliant mathematician who later received his Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota. He wrote her adoring love letters that started with greetings such as “Huhwo gorgeous girl” and long lines of prose worthy of a charming Hallmark greeting card. He even sang in a barbershop quartet.<sup>1</sup> In one letter during their engagement, he gushed over her; he promised that when he returned, he was “gonna squeeze you, and kiss you and snuggle, and we gonna play

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<sup>1</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to Family, June 16, 1966, Sonia Johnson Pa-

togezzer [sic] and laugh togezzer and swim togezzer and all these togezzers.” He signed the letter lovingly: “con mi passionata, Dick.”<sup>2</sup>

As the daughter of a seminary teacher with four siblings, Sonia had been brought up white, conservative, and mainstream. After her marriage, the couple supported Republican politics and were saddened at Richard Nixon’s loss; Richard wrote her parents that they planned the election celebration prematurely: “We shouldn’t have had the party since Kennedy was elected.”<sup>3</sup> In fall 1965, Sonia moved with Richard to Lagos, Nigeria, where he worked for the American Research Institute on a fellowship in conjunction with the USAID. The Johnsons lived in Lagos from 1965 to 1967 where she was exposed to Africa front-and-center. What the vast majority of Saints saw as the Church’s rather distant “negro problem” was now her daily, lived reality.

Sonia Johnson’s story is not one but many stories—the story of the Mormon people coming to grips with racial consciousness. When she set foot in Africa, she began to experience a change. As had often been the case with Mormonism, geography played a central role in her theological worldview. For cloistered mountain Mormons accustomed to the idea of turning the barren into the habitable, Africa had proven itself a distant and elusive paradise, a forbidding wilderness, and an inviting challenge. As decolonization swept across Africa during the 1950s, Mormons in Utah expressed ambivalence about the continent’s future. At once hopeful about independence—the unattained dream of nineteenth-century Mormonism—and stability—which they received in exchange for adopting American values and politics—Africa as an idea represented a collective Rorschach through which the Mormon community saw itself.

But Africa imagined is not Africa experienced. Africa as it existed in the minds of most mid-twentieth-century Mormondom was

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pers, Box 3, fd. 16, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. All correspondence to and from Sonia and/or Richard Johnson cited in this article is from this collection, cited by date, box, and folder number.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Johnson, Letter to Sonia Johnson, July 10, 1959, Sonia Johnson Papers, Box 2, fd. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Johnson, Letter to Sonia Johnson, November 10, 1960, Box 1, fd. 1.

the object of American thought, lacking agentive force. It was the prism through which American Mormons saw their own light, not a light unto itself. It was a symbol, not a force. For those adventuresome Mormons who dared to visit Africa on its own terms, it could exercise a kind of transformative power, turning narrow-viewed youth into environmentalists, activists, and public intellectuals. Historian Phillip Jenkins, one of the Mormon History Association's distinguished Tanner Lecturers, observed that "the era of Western Christianity has passed within our lifetimes."<sup>4</sup> It was true of expatriate American Mormons in Africa; they saw white American Mormondom pass away before their eyes.

By the time Sonia Johnson reached Africa, she had thoroughly accepted the hard-argued belief that blacks had forfeited their right to hold the priesthood in the premortal life due to a failure to follow the Savior's plan; indeed, as USU communications professor John Stewart said in a widely consumed pamphlet, it was their good fortune that God had not cast them off from the outset. But Mormons who stayed in Africa long enough to know Africans on their own terms found such a proposition untenable. As one Nigerian man told the young Mormon missionary, Marvin Jones: "We need to come to America and teach you Christianity." Jones paused: "I think that maybe he's right."<sup>5</sup>

This article tells the story of Mormon expatriates living in Africa from the 1850s through 1978, focusing on how they represent the emergence of a global *mentalité* in modern Mormonism. Their story is not only one of well-dressed men conferring in polished boardrooms in the Church Administration Building in downtown Salt Lake City. It is also the story of a housewife strolling the Nigerian coastline, an explorer kayaking the Nile, and an attorney shooting elephants. The forces molding their perceptions of race were complex and varied; while theology certainly played a major role in the formation of their racial assumptions, the geographic, lived experience of Africa had a tendency to overpower whatever theological assumptions they had brought with them to the continent. While Mormons in Utah were locked in a bitter struggle over questions regarding civil rights,

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<sup>4</sup>Phillip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>5</sup>Marvin Jones, Letter to Dorothy Buckley, October 28, 1961, Marvin Jones Papers, LDS Church History Library.

Africa molded those visiting Saints into the kind of community who could accept the 1978 revelation.<sup>6</sup>

Africa's geographic space compelled Mormon expatriates to reconsider the racial assumptions that they had once held fundamental to their worldview. With remarkable consistency, Africa forced the Saints to reconsider their racial assumptions and ultimately played a role in crafting a new sense of Mormon racial community that would allow for the inclusion of the black community. In both cases, Africans appear primarily as the objects of Mormon missionary labors. At the time of their writing, the voices of African Saints had not been catalogued as thoroughly as they are now, placing researchers in the position of perpetuating the voice of white American Mormons in their analysis. Thanks to new sources and new voices, scholars can now understand that Mormon missionizing was, in fact, a relationship of reciprocity. White Mormons did not fashion and refashion their racial attitudes using Africa merely as a canvas. African Mormons played an active role in the white Mormons' racial reconstructive process beginning in the early twentieth century and continuing well beyond the receipt of the 1978 revelation on the priesthood.

### INTO AFRICA (1853–1915)

Africa had not always wielded this kind of transformative power on the Saints. During the first mission to South Africa in the early 1850s, Mormons understood Africa to be—like the American frontier—first and foremost a wilderness. They conceptualized blacks as part of the forbidding environment. Jesse Haven, one of the earliest Mormon missionaries in South Africa, was well aware that “the gospel has got to be preached to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people” and that “Israel is to be hunted up.” His concern was less about the village blacks than the Dutch (Boer) villagers who spoke little English:

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<sup>6</sup> In 1983, historian Newell G. Bringhurst wrote what perhaps was the first substantive work on Mormon attitudes toward blacks. His work usefully describes how shifting official attitudes prevented or enabled Mormons to engage in missionary work in the continent. In 1986, Reed Clegg, himself one of the first LDS missionaries to West Africa, produced an article-length memoir about his experiences. But it largely concentrated on LDS humanitarian efforts in West Africa after the lifting of the priesthood ban. Reed Clegg, “Friends of West Africa,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 94–106.

“To find many of the inhabitants of this colony . . . scattered among the mountains, hills, and deserts of Africa” felt “like going on a hunting tour.”<sup>7</sup> In fact, Haven, and his companions, Leonard I. Smith and William H. Walker, projected their Utah wilderness experience onto the South African context. On May 23, 1852, they climbed a mountain in Capetown called “the Lion’s Head” and renamed it “Mount Bigham [sic], Heber, and Willard,” a name which they confidently expected to be known by “Saints throughout the world.” The missionaries expressed little concern about racial difference in their writings. On Queen Victoria’s birthday in May 1852, Haven observed that the “children were a mixed multitude of all colors, that is from jet black to snow white.”<sup>8</sup>

Haven approved of “the Kaffirs hav[ing] a plurality of wives,” since it ensured that “there is more virtue among the sexes, with them, than there is among the whites.” But he dismissed other Christians’ efforts to proselytize them as, at best, futile and, at worst, harmful: “They [the Christian missionaries] have succeeded in introducing among them some of the licentious customs of our refined cities.” Ultimately, the black tribes “have too much of the blood of Cain in them, for the Gospel to have much effect on their dark spirits.”<sup>9</sup> For the next fifty years, white Mormons in Africa felt fear and intimidation at the sight of black people. Blacks played a central role in the apocalyptic vision that had defined Mormonism from the beginning; in 1864, one South African resident warned Utah Saints that “in a few short years . . . God will stir up the Kaffirs and make them the instruments of his anger.”<sup>10</sup> The following year, the South African mission closed, taking most of the handful of white South African Saints with the missionaries to Utah.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Church leaders again considered sending missionaries to white South Africa. Four missionaries, Warren H. Lyon, William R. Smith, George R. Simkins, and

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<sup>7</sup>Jesse Haven, Letter to Franklin D. Richards, February 12, 1855, *Millennial Star* 17, no. 22 (June 2, 1855): 348.

<sup>8</sup>Jesse Haven, Diary, May 24, 1852, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>9</sup>Jesse Haven, Letter to Franklin D. Richards, May 13, 1856, *Millennial Star* 18, no. 23 (June 7, 1856): 367.

<sup>10</sup>A. H. Noon, “Correspondence,” *Millennial Star* 26 (December 10, 1864): 797.

Thomas Lewis Griffiths—all from Utah—arrived in Capetown in July 1903 to reopen the mission.<sup>11</sup> Lyon immediately noticed that “the streets were filled with Negroes as we left the landing.” William R. Smith, who had been born in South Africa, was impressed by the city’s “cosmopolitan” nature. “The mixture of races is not equal anywhere, not even in Honolulu.”<sup>12</sup>

This new quartet of missionaries began to use a different tone to describe local Africans. Whereas Haven had dismissed blacks as entirely unfit for the gospel message, these missionaries expressed awe for the learning of native Africans. In 1905, Lyon met “a young Zulu” named “Dunn,” the son of Scotch-Zulu union, “who has shown a deep interest in the Book of Mormon.” Impressed by the fact that he spoke seven languages, Lyon admitted that he “wished I could speak English as fluently as he appears to.” This Zulu prince hoped to translate Mormon pamphlets into Zulu and was “anxious to have the correct understanding of the scriptures taught to his people.” Lyon felt “no hurry,” for he was skeptical about whether Dunn would sincerely “take an interest in the gospel.”<sup>13</sup> Unspoken was his apprehension about whether Dunn’s interest would continue when he encountered the priesthood ban.

Mormons had no interpretive tools to understand the origins of black people, as they did with Native Americans. Quoting the words of an old Mormon hymn, Elder Orson M. Rogers, who served in South Africa from September 1906 to November 1909, observed: “At home we can say to our Indian: ‘O, stop and tell me, Red man / Who are you, why you roam / And how you get your living / Have you no God, no home?’” And the Book of Mormon could give them answers.<sup>14</sup>

But Mormons had “no such book that can tell us much about our colored brethren on this hemisphere . . . so recourse to ethnologists must be had.” The first theory he cited attributed the dark skin to “climate, environment, and custom.” It was possible, he believed,

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<sup>11</sup>Evan P. Wright, *A History of the South African Mission*, 3 vols. (N.pub.: self-published, ca. 1985), 2:1.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:5.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 2:23.

<sup>14</sup>For Rogers’s mission dates, see “New York Mecca of Many Utahns,” *Salt Lake Herald*, December 5, 1909, 41.



that “thousands of years of tropical sun beating down on our naked bodies would be sufficient to produce a change in the color of the skin that would eventually be inherited from generation to generation.” Rogers thus distanced himself and the Saints from the “theory which has been advanced by a few, and not upheld by many . . . that the dark skin is the result of a curse from the Almighty God.”<sup>15</sup>

Rogers admittedly came to South Africa with a clear set of racial assumptions: “When I first came here I thought every one was a negro who had a dark skin and kinky hair . . . but I found that there are different classifications made by Colonials.” Though rare, he had learned that “the true negro[es]” were “fine specimens of humanity, with large sinewy bodies, well-shaped and agile.” But “pure negro[es]” were “so rare in Cape Colony” that his theorizing was based on sheer speculation. However, he felt on firmer ground in characterizing the “Bushmen” as “the lowest type of the human family . . . much like intelligent beasts.” The “Hottentots” are a “filthy people” who “gladly live on the refuge of rubbish heaps” and “sort out the garbage barrels.” He found “the morals of the natives” to be “terrible . . . in fact they have little sense of wrong.” When it came to missionary work, Rogers made no overt reference to a priesthood ban, saying only that the elders “do very little work among the colored people, as we consider that our message is more important to the whites at present.” But Rogers admitted to fatigue—and perhaps apprehension—at seeing so many blacks and looked forward to the day where they “are seen only in Pullman cars or in restaurants.”<sup>16</sup> Generally, missionaries were more interested in the building of Western economic infrastructure. After one missionary gave a detailed accounting of the country’s civic buildings and transportation facilities, he “trusted that what has been said will show that African cities are modern and up-to-date, rivaling those found in other new cities.”<sup>17</sup>

But a handful of black Saints joined, overriding white indifference and actual discouragement. William P. Daniels and Paul T.

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<sup>15</sup>Orson M. Rogers, “Native Tribes of South Africa,” *Improvement Era*, March 12, 1909, 627. “O Stop and Tell Me, Red Man,” was composed by W.W. Phelps and was included in the 1835 LDS hymnal. See Emma Smith, ed., *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams and Co., 1835), 83.

<sup>16</sup> Rogers, “Native Tribes of South Africa,” 627.

<sup>17</sup>Wright, *A History of the South African Mission*, 2:52.

Harris had both been members since the 1910s. Harris was a chef for the Fordsberg Police Barracks and a single man living in Pretoria. Missionary June B. Sharp later recollected Harris praying down a miracle for Sharp and his companion, Elder Lester Stoddard. The missionaries were visiting Harris when a violent thunderstorm broke. Sharp remembered: "Brother Harris told the missionaries not to be concerned; they got down on their knees and prayed; he asked the Lord to stop the storm until the elders could return to their quarters. The rain stopped immediately but started as soon as the elders returned home."<sup>18</sup> Another missionary, Elder Wilford LeCheminant recalled a dinner Paul Harris prepared for the missionaries, during which he "bore his testimony to us while we ate" and said a prayer. LeCheminant thought it "as beautiful a speech and prayer as I ever heard."<sup>19</sup>

Daniels, a tailor in Mowbray, nearby Capetown, became a singular figure in the history of black Mormonism in South African. A tailor by trade, Daniels and his wife, Alice, also rented riding horses and ran a horse-drawn taxi company. After meeting his first Mormon elder, Elder Alfred J. Gowers, Daniels was impressed by the missionary's devotion: "He had come 13,000 miles to preach the Gospel, and was not receiving a penny. . . . This struck me very forcibly, and I compared his position with that of my minister who was earning a comfortable if not fat salary and was living in a house given him free by the congregation." In 1915, Daniels traveled to Utah to meet Church President Joseph F. Smith in person; Smith willingly gave a blessing to Daniels by the laying on of hands, assuring him that someday he would receive the priesthood. The blessing touched Daniels: "Some day," he told fellow Saints, "perhaps in the next life, he would be able to hold the priesthood."<sup>20</sup> When he asked what Smith wanted him to tell his countrymen about Mormonism, including the priesthood

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<sup>18</sup>Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Nicholas Groesbeck Smith, 1881-1945: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Privately published for Nicholas Groesbeck Smith Jr. and Marion Burrows Smith, 2000), 161; used by permission. Citations are to the pagination in the e-file, courtesy of Lavina Fielding Anderson.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *Nicholas Groesbeck Smith*, 162.



*William P. Daniels (1864–1936), 1930s, of Capetown, South Africa, the only known branch president who did not hold priesthood. Mission President Don M. Dalton called Daniels one of his “loyalist [sic], kindest, sweetest, friends.” Courtesy LDS Church History Library.*



*Mission President Nicholas G. Smith (1881–1945), served from 1914 to 1921. Photo courtesy Nicholas G. Smith Jr.*

ban, Smith told him: “Tell them the truth.”<sup>21</sup>

In 1913, thirty-two-year-old Nicholas Groesbeck Smith, George Albert Smith’s half-brother, accepted the calling to be president of the South African Mission. When his wife, Florence Farr Smith, learned of the mission call, her first response was dismay: “Oh that horrid black place!”<sup>22</sup> Nicholas expressed greater tolerance. One of his four sons, Gerald Gay Smith, recalls Nicholas’s relationship to “Ab” Howells, a black member of West High School’s football team, of which Nicholas was team captain. When an Ogden restaurant told Howells that he could not dine with the rest of the team but had to eat in the kitchen. Smith told the manager that “we’ll all eat in the kitchen with him.”<sup>23</sup> And they did.

In South Africa, as Nicholas and Florence came to know Harris

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<sup>21</sup> Wright, *A History of the South African Mission*, 2:255.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>23</sup>Lavina F. Anderson, “A Ministry of Blessing: Nicholas Groesbeck

and Daniels, their racial sensitivity came into sharper focus. On one occasion, Smith records attending a Sunday School class with Daniels. A member “brought up the question of color”; though Smith does not indicate what was said, it was certainly offensive: “Daniels [was] the only colored man present” and “felt somewhat hurt.”<sup>24</sup> Yet Daniels continued to attend and, in fact, with Nicholas Smith’s permission, started his own branch with his family as its members. This group came to be known as “the Branch of Love,” attended regularly by teams of elders who joined in the gospel conversations. In later years, the branch received official Church recognition. In 1932, President Don M. Dalton set Daniels apart as an official branch president without priesthood, the only known instance of a black member receiving such a calling in the history of Mormonism. After Daniels’s death in 1936, Dalton called Daniels “one of my loyalist [sic], kindest, sweetest, friends.”<sup>25</sup>

The South African black Mormon experience left a complicated legacy for subsequent missionary efforts. As both a symbol of retrenchment and progressivism, it demonstrated the degree to which racial thought could stymie missionary labors as well as the capacity for local leaders to adapt to circumstances within the parameters of directives they received from higher-level leaders. In 1909, Rogers had expressed little regret about restricting missionary labors to the white population; after all, gathering Israel was “more important” than reaching out to the “degraded Hottentot.” However, when Dalton informed Church leaders in Salt Lake City of the “Branch of Love,” they did nothing to discourage it. Local accommodation and doctrinal orthodoxy played out in a complicated dance in which neither party fully respected their partners’ dance steps.

### THE EXPLORERS (1950–71)

With the exception of the small enclave of Saints in South Africa, for the first half of the twentieth century, Mormons saw Africa primarily as a land of wildlife and wilderness. In 1955, Rendell Mabey,

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Smith,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 61 note 3; Sunstone presentation Audiotape SL97, #254.

<sup>24</sup>Anderson, *Nicholas Groesbeck Smith*, Diary, April 26, 1917.

<sup>25</sup>Notation on back of William P. Daniels’s photo, Don M. Dalton Mission Papers, Box 1, fd. 3, LDS Church History Library.



*Don McCarroll Dalton, president of the South African Mission (1929–35), and his wife, Myrtle. Dalton organized the Daniels family meeting as a Church unit. Photo courtesy of LDS Church History Library.*

an attorney from Bountiful, Utah, embarked on a widely publicized animal hunt in Lundazi, Zambia, publishing extracts of his extravagant exploits in the *Davis County Clipper*: “We saw cape buffalo, kudu, wildebeaste, roan antelope, water buck, brush buck, zebra, impala, warthog, puku [a kind of antelope] crocodile, rhinoceros, eland, hyena, hippo, guinea fowl, egyptian geese, and huge spur-winged geese.” On his first night in their camp he did not sleep well. “The growl of the lion at night is rather nerve racking as is the leopard.”<sup>26</sup> When Mabey shot an elephant, he proudly lavished details on his readers: “He appeared to be a fine trophy—his tusks about four feet long—another two feet will be in his flesh.” Native Africans (“boys”) performed any manual labor. When Mabey asked Schultz, another hunter, why natives led out in hunting expeditions, Schultz explained that “a bear [sic] footed African while leading the line unconsciously was also [l]ooking underfoot for snakes and other objectionable items. . . . A tracker or leader—with a flick of the toe in the dust can constantly test the wind.”<sup>27</sup>

Mabey found it noteworthy when he saw Africans using industrialized technology: “In one little village some 280 miles from the nearest white settlement I was surprised to see a young girl using a sewing machine.”<sup>28</sup> He cast the Africans as creatures of nature, fitting seamlessly into jungle life that would have repelled “civilized” human beings. When he divided up the elephant meat to local villagers, the women filled their baskets and “placed [them] on their heads—it made no difference that blood was streaming down their faces and bodies from the baskets.” They “strapped their babies on their backs and trudged off through the forest and back to [their] home, probably wondering why some foolish hunter was content with two tusks and a tail.”<sup>29</sup> Although rare, such attempts to imagine the thoughts and feelings of the natives are noteworthy. Equally noteworthy is the fact that this mental reconstruction did not leave the white hunter as the morally superior person. In 1978, immediately following the priesthood revelation, Mabey and his wife, Rachel, were among the first missionary couples to serve in West Africa.

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<sup>26</sup>“Safari in Africa,” *Davis County Clipper*, November 11, 1955, 1.

<sup>27</sup>“Safari in Africa,” *Davis County Clipper*, November 18, 1955, 1.

<sup>28</sup>“Safari in Africa,” November 11, 1955, 1.

<sup>29</sup>“Safari in Africa,” *Davis County Clipper*, November 25, 1955, 1.

Mabey was a well-to-do attorney looking for adventure, but John M. Goddard was, first and foremost, an explorer of Africa who happened to be fortunate enough to achieve some wealth in the process. A Salt Lake City native, Goddard had had a restless spirit since adolescences. While serving his mission in the Northern States, he lectured, not on Mormon doctrine or even on Book of Mormon arcana, but on his travels as a teenager. He was, after all, the youngest member of the Adventurers Club, the world's explorers' association.

Yet in spite of his restless spirit, Goddard exhibited the features common to mid-twentieth-century Mormons who valued hard work and clean living. When Goddard visited Marseilles, he "wander[ed] from room to room" in a gaming establishment, "watching the fashionably dressed 'gamers' around the roulette and baccarat tables." He expressed disgust for this "immoderate and purposeless living."<sup>30</sup> When his friends took him for a drink, it was "beer for the boys and lemon squash for me," he told his family in America.<sup>31</sup>

In 1950 at age twenty-three, Goddard embarked on an adventure that one observer thought would be a "triple suicide": he and two friends decided to be the first to kayak down the Nile. His first impression of Africa was a land of natural beauty. "Ah! Africa le Magnifique! Can it really be true?" he said. Goddard was swept away by "the altitudes, climates, types of vegetation, races, animal life, terrain, and bodies of water."<sup>32</sup> African sunshine dazzled him: "Why do people always refer to Africa as the 'Dark Continent' when it's a land of blazing sunshine?"<sup>33</sup> Although native peoples had not made his original list, he idealized the African villages he passed on his way up the Nile, showing all the characteristics of a preservationist who had fallen in love with the natural world in its pristine beauty. He con-

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<sup>30</sup>John M. Goddard, Letter to Family, September 20, 19850, John M. Goddard Papers, Box 1, fd. 1, Perry Special Collections, Lee Library, BYU, Provo; hereafter Goddard Papers.

<sup>31</sup>John M. Goddard, Letter to family, October 3, 1950, Goddard Papers, Box 1, fd. 1.

<sup>32</sup>"One Man's Life of No Regrets," *Life*, March 24, 1972, 66; John M. Goddard, Letter to Family, n.d.(prob. ca. October 1950), typescript, Box 1, fd. 1, Goddard Papers.

<sup>33</sup>John M. Goddard, Letter to family, January 10, 1951, Box 1, fd. 2, Goddard Papers.





*African explorer John M. Goddard, ca. 1960s posing with masks collected during his travels in Africa. His lectures and books were popular with Latter-day Saints. Photo courtesy of Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.*

trasted the “fine home,” “well-tended garden,” and French gourmet cooking of some French expatriates with their “primitive” surroundings.

In 1956 he took another trip into the heart of Africa, this time to explore the Congo region. During his travels he betrayed his youthful affection for Western industry. He extolled the “minerals galore” that the Congolese enjoyed: “water, forest products, labor—& a rare commodity called peace.”<sup>34</sup> He credited the Belgian colonists for “creating peace on a continent where unrest is the rule” and noted ominously that “over half the uranium in the free world” was produced in the Congo.<sup>35</sup> He gloried that “men whose fathers practiced cannibalism & who may still wear grotesque tribal markings on their faces now operate complex mining machinery, cranes, steam shovels, locomotives & diesel powered boats ”<sup>36</sup> He condemned the village medicine men: “These primitive people rarely trust white men’s medicine preferring to put their faith in their worthless witch-doctors—the greatest ‘quacks’ in the world.”<sup>37</sup> Yet at the same time he grew poetic in attempting to describe the “zillions of fireflies & brilliant stars overhead” that “seem to vie with each other.” Goddard valued Africa as a kind of geographical shock therapy for the overly modernized. He applauded African dance as a means of sweeping away modern “anxieties, neuroses, psychoses, and repressions.” “This really is a great release for pent up emotions and frustrated feelings and I’m speaking from experience because I proved the theory by actual experiment.”<sup>38</sup>

His views of the native peoples were considerably more complicated. He rejoiced in “the gregariousness of the native—his sense of brotherhood.” But he presented the native in a series of stereotypes, many (though not all) laudable but also one-dimensional. Goddard loved “his reserved politeness” and “his keen, hearty sense of humor.”

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<sup>34</sup>John M. Goddard, Congo Journal, May 27, 1956, typescript, Box 1, fd. 6, Goddard Papers.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Goddard, Congo Journal, May 27, 1956, Box 1, fd. 6, Goddard Papers.

<sup>37</sup>Goddard, Letter to Family, January 10, 1951, holograph, Box 1, fd. 2, Goddard Papers.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., January 4, 1951, Box 1, fd. 2, Goddard Papers.

He patronizingly extolled the native's "child-like curiosity and wonderment" and "his faith in the ultimate triumph of good over bad, right over wrong." He wished he could enjoy the natives' "cheerful laziness" and smiled at their "soft-spoken 'Jambo buana.' (hello, sir)." He found "their clownish dancing" charming: "so uninhibited and appealing." Ultimately, he concluded, "their lives are a never ending succession of merriment and misery, faith and famine, bravery and barbarism, humor and hookworm, dignity and death."<sup>39</sup>

Goddard won national acclaim for his travels down both the Nile and Congo Rivers. He produced two documentaries: *Kayaks down the Nile* and *Bongos down the Congo* depicting his experiences. During one presentation at a school, he invited blacks from Surinam to perform fire dances. Goddard donated the proceeds from some presentations to the Church's building and missionary funds.

Initially, Goddard billed himself to Mormon audiences as, first and foremost, a believer in "eternal progression," which he said served as a "constant source of inspiration in my own life." Goddard told *New Era* readers that "we live most intensely when we are expressing our God-given abilities in action, and life takes on new meaning when we constantly expand our horizons and add new dimensions."<sup>40</sup> For 30 years, he gave presentations across the country, celebrating everything African ranging from its black population to its natural beauties. Following one presentation in Southern California, a teacher thanked him for giving the students "the opportunity to hear a very masculine person of note reveal sensitivities for other people, the environment, our systems etc. There is a real need for this kind of balance in young people." He told a Provo audience that "the brain has no color and intelligence is equally distributed throughout the peoples of the world."<sup>41</sup> In 1975, James Warner, a member of the Seventies Council in the Los Angeles Stake, thanked Goddard for showing his "love for God's many children." "Love of this magnitude," Warner

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., October, 26 1950, holograph, Box 1, fd. 1, Goddard Papers. See also Goddard, Letter to family, n.d. [ca. October 1950], Box 1, fd. 2, Goddard Papers.

<sup>40</sup>John Goddard, "I Have A Question," *New Era*, July 1974, 10.

<sup>41</sup>"A Man of Little Monkey Business," *Monday Magazine* (Provo, Utah), April 7, 1975, 17. For a brief discussion of *Monday Magazine*, see Bryan Waterman and Brian Kagel, *The Lord's University: Freedom and Authority at BYU* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 81.

promised Goddard, “can’t help but open many doors and avenues unto you to further your understanding of the world and the Lord’s ecumenical enterprise of winning souls to his eternal verities.”<sup>42</sup>

As Goddard and Rendell Mabey sought to conquer the rivers and elephants of Africa, South African Mission President Glen G. Fisher, a Albertan merchant who had earlier served as mission president for Western Canada as well as on a school board in Glenwood, California, was being commissioned by the First Presidency to investigate the growing number of Nigerians calling themselves by the Mormon name.<sup>43</sup> In 1960 Fisher flew to Nigeria en route from his mission in South Africa. The scene he found disheartened him and exposed some of his own racial sensibilities: “The Negro people . . . were unable to cope with problems, neither were they able to make decisions.”<sup>44</sup> Nigerians were “easily provoked” and “extremely excitable under pressure.”<sup>45</sup> But the welcome of the self-identified Nigerian Mormons tempered his harsh criticism: “I introduced myself as a Mormon missionary, and they immediately reached out and took both my hands.” It was a singular moment: “Never have I received a more sincere and enthusiastic welcome.”<sup>46</sup>

The following year, the First Presidency commissioned a newly called elder en route to the South African Mission, Marvin Jones, to join Missionary Department liaison Lamar Williams in visiting Nigeria, after which he would continue on to South Africa. A Bountiful native, Jones liked Pat Boone, Nat King Cole, and the Everly Brothers. His initial impressions of Africa were, like Goddard’s, wonder at the natural environment. He wrote to his girlfriend, Dorothy Buckley:

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<sup>42</sup>James Warner of the Seventies Council of the Los Angeles Stake, Letter to John M. Goddard, March 8, 1975, holograph, Box 3, fd. 9, Goddard Papers.

<sup>43</sup>For more on Fisher’s background, see “Fisher Elected,” *Lethbridge Herald*, January 12, 1940, 13; “Church Names Canadian Bishop to Head Mission,” *Deseret News*, April 19, 1947, 4; “Mission Head,” *Cardston News*, April 24, 1947, 1; “Local Missionary Praised for Work,” *Murray Eagle*, November 23, 1951, 5.

<sup>44</sup>Glen Fisher, “Assignment Presidency to Visit Nigeria,” n.d., events ca. fall 1960, Glen Fisher Correspondence, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

“Lizards are everywhere and as big as a foot or more long to smaller ones. Even running up the hotel walls.” He had no choice but to “live out of filth.”<sup>47</sup> He heard others agree: “People are ashamed of their town because of the bad conditions,” he observed; one man had begged him, “Don’t take a picture of that”—a run-down quarter of Lagos. “It misrepresents us.”<sup>48</sup>

But Jones looked beyond these squalid conditions. When he and Lamar Williams held meetings, he saw men, women, and children walk for miles—carrying their own seats—just to hear them speak. “They know that they are unworthy to hold the priesthood but want us to stay & teach all day,” he wrote, impressed by their devotion.<sup>49</sup> Jones’s older companion, Lamar Williams, didn’t “know how we can keep the Church and eventually the priesthood from them.”<sup>50</sup> When Jones met a “small boy named Nathan,” he was moved; he “wished I could take him with me. I hope he will always be ok. I truly have touched his heart as he has mine.”<sup>51</sup>

After Jones had left for South Africa and Williams for the United States, it was clear that the mission had its desired effect after Williams reported to First Presidency. Williams joyfully informed Jones that he would be “returning to Nigeria within the next few months.” If things went as planned, “we will begin work among these people.” The mission had to be kept confidential, as “it is still the desire of the First Presidency to keep this as quiet as possible until we know where we are going from here.”<sup>52</sup>

Williams and Jones had been won over but faced significant hurdles to expanding the missionary effort. The primary problem came from their home state in which John J. Stewart, a professor of communications at Utah State University, had written the apologetic *Mormonism and the Negro*, which authoritatively spelled out all of the well-established doctrinal tropes, including the claim that blacks had

<sup>47</sup>Marvin Jones, Diary, October 18, 1961, Jones Papers.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Jones, Diary, October 22, 1961.

<sup>50</sup>Lamar Williams, Diary, October 29, 1961, Lamar S. Williams Papers, LDS Church History Library (hereafter Williams Papers).

<sup>51</sup>Jones, Diary, October 22, 1961.

<sup>52</sup>Lamar Williams, Letter to Marvin Jones, November 8, 1962, Jones Papers.

been less valiant in the premortal life. Stewart chided blacks for complaining about their treatment, since the “very fact that God would allow those spirits who were less worthy . . . to partake of a mortal body” was evidence of “His infinite mercy and charity.”<sup>53</sup>

When Nigerian reporter and student Ambrose Chukwu, who was then studying at Cal-Polytechnic, read the volume, he exploded with rage. He immediately wrote to a regional Nigerian newspaper, *Nigerian Outlook*, and warned Nigerians against allowing these “mad-men” into the country disguised as Christian missionaries. Lowell Bennion, University of Utah Institute instructor, blushed upon hearing of Chukwu’s reaction but was more distraught that these racist sentiments were in print. “We have sown the wind,” he told his friend George Boyd, “and are reaping the whirlwind.”<sup>54</sup> Chukwu’s article prompted Nigerian officials to deny Mormon missionary visas; by the time Williams could begin negotiating with the Nigerian government, the eastern region of Biafra had declared independence, and the central government launched a military expedition to compel the Biafrans into compliance with the central government. All missionary efforts were scuttled, leaving the Nigerian Saints to fend for themselves for the next decade.

### THE PROFESSOR AND THE HOUSEWIFE (1960s–70s)

Where missionaries were failing, Mormon women connected with international development circles were making headway. Their kind of work was well known, even considered avant garde. Farmington banker Dale Clark told the Bountiful Kiwanis Club that the time had come for the United States to employ the “use of technicians instead of striped pants diplomats” to assist “backward and war ravaged countries.”<sup>55</sup> And few technicians were so well equipped to help as Park City native Dr. Virginia Cutler, one of the globe’s leading thinkers on family science.

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<sup>53</sup>John J. Stewart, *Mormonism and the Negro* (Orem, Utah: Community Press, 1960), 50.

<sup>54</sup>Lowell Bennion, Letter to George Boyd, October 21, 1963, quoted in Mary Bradford, *Lowell L. Bennion: Teacher, Counselor, Humanitarian* (Salt Lake City: Dialogue Foundation, 1995), 246.

<sup>55</sup>“Kiwanis Will Hear ‘Des. News.’ Editor,” *Davis County Clipper*, July 15, 1955, 1.

Cutler cut an unusual path for most Mormon women. Though she married at twenty-four, her husband, Ralph Garr Cutler, died only two years into the marriage, leaving Cutler pregnant and unemployed. She took work teaching in Taylorsville until she could afford to pursue graduate studies at Stanford. In 1946, she received her PhD from Cornell University.<sup>56</sup> After serving as the home economics department head at the University of Utah, she traveled to Thailand to work with the International Cooperative Administration to strengthen the educational system, after which she traveled to Indonesia to work with its school system for five more years.<sup>57</sup> She became known for her savvy as an administrator, and foreign governments regularly tapped her expertise in their efforts throughout the developing world. When the University of Ghana's Vice-Chancellor A.A. Kwapong approached Cornell University seeking an advisor to help his government develop home economics, administrators pointed to Cutler for the job.<sup>58</sup>

In 1966, Cutler received a Fulbright Fellowship in 1966 to head up a home economics program at the University of Ghana. Initially, the program floundered. "It all seemed utterly hopeless . . . there was no apparent interest," she recalled.<sup>59</sup> But by the time her work was done in 1969, the University of Ghana could proudly display a functional teaching lab, a children's study center, and a home science court.<sup>60</sup> That same year Cutler delivered in the inaugural address at the University of Ghana.<sup>61</sup> She also published *Woman Power, Social Imperatives, and Home Science* through the University of Ghana Press

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<sup>56</sup> "By Their Fruits," *Deseret News*, May 29, 1965, 5; "Death: Virginia Farrer Cutler," *Deseret News*, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/291676/DEATH-VIRGINIA-FARRER-CUTLER.html?pg=all> (accessed March 28, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> "Dr. Virginia Cutler," *Deseret News*, December 11, 1956, 16A; "Dr. Virginia Cutler Begins First Year as Y Family Living Dean," *Deseret News*, November 18 1961, 12.

<sup>58</sup> Cynthia M. Gardner, "Virginia Cutler—Her Home Is Where the Heart Is," *Ensign*, July 1985, 39.

<sup>59</sup> Carol Perkins, "Three Years in Africa," *Deseret News*, March 24, 1970, 12A.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> "ID Educator to Speak at BPW Meeting," *Ogden Standard-Examiner*,

(1969) and returned home the following year.

While she was teaching, a number of Ghanaian men, like the Nigerians, began to form their own ad hoc Mormon congregations, pushing for official recognition from Salt Lake City. Cutler wavered in her feelings toward these Ghanaian groups. Outwardly, she expressed her unqualified support. She gave the Ghanaians literature and attended their meetings, even while she foresaw the obstacle of the priesthood ban.<sup>62</sup> In 1974 Abraham F. Mensah, one of Ghanaian Mormonism's founders, assured Bernard P. Brockbank, president of the International Mission, that Cutler, by then a professor of home and family living at Brigham Young University, "can testify to the earnestness of Ghana."<sup>63</sup> Clement Osekre, one of the early founders of the Mormon movement in Ghana, considered Cutler to be an "outstanding educationist of the Church." One chronicle of Ghanaian Mormonism credited "this hard working and zealous lady" for bringing "much warmth and a ray of hope" for the small group.<sup>64</sup>

As a well-educated Mormon woman, Cutler committed herself to the education of the Latter-day Saints, particularly the expansion of their cultural geography. In 1970, she urged *Improvement Era* readers: "The world is getting smaller and smaller, and we should be acquainted with what is happening in other parts of the world. . . . It used to be that it didn't matter if you knew anything about what was going on in Ghana or in South Africa, but today we need to expand our knowledge as far as we can. Each of us needs to make his world very, very big." After her return to the United States in 1969, Cutler called her experience in Ghana "one of the most challenging, rewarding, exhilarating and frustrating experiences of my life." She "became color blind," she told a group of women at the University of Utah: "I realize more than ever that the color of a

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October 23, 1969, 43.

<sup>62</sup>No author specified, "A Short Report on the Ghana Mission," September 10, 1973, Ghana and Nigeria Files, LDS Church History (hereafter Ghana and Nigeria Files).

<sup>63</sup>Abraham F. Mensah, Letter to Bernard P. Brockbank, January 21, 1974, Ghana and Nigeria Files.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, September 10, 1973.



person's skin is not important."<sup>65</sup>

Cutler had dreams for the Mormon people, but she was on the horns of a dilemma. Despite her genuine warmth toward the Ghanaian Saints, her loyalties were to her university and the Church that ran it. The documentary record does not allow for a thorough analysis of her views on the priesthood, but the public record makes it clear that she had divided sympathies. In 1976 she told *Exponent II*, a modern revival of the historic *Woman's Exponent*, that she "love[d] and honor[ed] the priesthood" but nevertheless believed that she "ha[d] some power too." Though willing to think outside the box, she could not provide support for unofficial congregations in defiance of priesthood authorities. She worried that encouraging activity would only raise false hopes in the Ghanaians and that it was only a matter of time before Church leadership would crack down. Tactfully, she found ways to distance herself from the group, apparently on good terms since the Ghanaians never spoke ill of her in their histories or correspondence.

While Cutler was teaching in Ghana, a thirty-year-old Sonia Johnson moved to Lagos, Nigeria, in December 1966 with her husband, Richard, and two of their four eventually children. During their engagement, Richard wrote her in extravagant adoration: "Sweetest Soni Lu," he began to address when she was away on a trip. "But you're not!" he continued in mock anguish. "No! Any one who professes to love me and whom I love so terribly much and then leaves me cannot be as sweet as you are. Life has been a vacuous empty unfilled disgusting mess since you left."<sup>66</sup> Sonia returned the affection. In August 1965, after the birth of her first child, she was "fitted for a diaphragm." Having healed well from the birth, she wrote her husband, then traveling abroad, that she was "anxiously awaiting your sweet lil frame." Suddenly aware of her explicitness, she playfully warned Johnson that "we'll have to destroy this letter. . . . What would our posterity think?" She signed the letter: "Wife of Life (meaning Eternal)."<sup>67</sup>

As a talented statistician, Richard worked for USAID, followed by a fellowship with the American Institution of Research, also in Ni-

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<sup>65</sup> Carol Perkins, "Three Years in Africa," A12.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Johnson, Letter to Sonia Johnson, June 29, 1959, Box 2, fd. 1.

<sup>67</sup> Sonia Johnson, Letter to Richard Johnson, August 23, 1965, Box 2,

geria. Sonia had just finished her PhD in education from Rutgers and looked forward to making her own contribution in Africa with Richard's enthusiastic support. "You can't keep talent down," he said of his wife's abilities.<sup>68</sup> In later years, when she had found her cause in opposing Mormon patriarchy, Sonia Johnson described herself as a "perfectly conditioned patriarchal woman . . . well-integrated into a society that believes that women are made to please men." Indeed, her Nigeria correspondence gives no apparent evidence that women's issues were at all on her mind. Johnson had shown a rebellious streak in her youth; when a ward member suggested that a woman who had committed sexual transgression could never achieve restored purity, Johnson challenged her in open meeting.<sup>69</sup> Still, her early commitment to Mormonism as well as the Mormon institution could hardly be questioned. In her correspondence with her family during her time in Nigeria, she wrote of regular fasting, scripture reading, and family prayer. After hearing the rumor that a temple was being constructed in Jackson County, Missouri, the idyllic Garden of Eden in Mormon theology, she was elated: "I'd love to think that it was really starting to wind itself up, this old world of ours, but I'll just have to have patience, I guess."<sup>70</sup>

But she still anguished over birth control. When her husband expressed his desire to stop having children after their second child, she was troubled: "I don't remember anything in the temple ceremony that would help us solve the problem of family size," she wondered. "Is it in the Bible too? If so, give us a hint. I've thought and thought."<sup>71</sup> She pored over the writings of Joseph Fielding Smith, apostle and future Church president, who said that "anyone who practices birth control is damned." If he "speaks for the Church," she concluded, then "that's that." She did not disbelieve the prophet: she just

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fd. 2.

<sup>68</sup>Richard Johnson, Letter to Alvin and Ida Harris [hereafter Harris], October 3, 1965, Box 3, fd. 9.

<sup>69</sup>Richard J. Jensen and John C. Hammerback, "Feminists of Faith: Sonia Johnson and the Mormons for ERA," *Communication Studies* 36 (1985): 124-25.

<sup>70</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to Harris, August 28, 1966, Box 3, fd. 11.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

“want[ed] to be sure.”<sup>72</sup> In spite of her questions, her faith was unyielding: “We know the Lord is answering our prayers,” she rejoiced: “we just can’t discern all the blessings the Lord showers upon us.”<sup>73</sup>

Similarly, Sonia Johnson’s upbringing offers no evidence of racial sensibility beyond what most white Americans would acquire while watching mass media. However, her two-year-long sojourn in Nigeria heightened her awareness of racial problems in Mormonism. Johnson, unlike the rest of her family, already expressed sympathy for African Americans. Shortly after arriving in Nigeria in fall 1965, she commented on the new racial milieu that faced her in the city of Lagos. But it was hardly a point worthy of social protest. Johnson ribbed her family that only her mother was invited to visit: “The rest of you can’t come because you don’t like Negroes, and there are a few of them around!” The Johnsons liked their black help, and Sonia commented: “Rick was just saying . . . that we hardly notice the color of skin anymore.” In fact, “one gets accustomed to seeing only black bodies so much” that they came to be more surprised when they saw Englishmen or Americans.<sup>74</sup>

Her family, she knew too well, was less accustomed—and far less open—to mingling with blacks so freely. She tried to explain her experience in terms her traditional Mormon family would understand: unlike “the Samoans,” the Nigerians are “shrewder businessmen and women, and the educated and cultured ones rival the educated and cultured people of any race or culture for grace and good breeding.” Indeed, she felt awkward around well-educated Nigerians. Her steward, a man named Kevin, was “respectful of himself as well as of us, and has a definitive air of integrity and self-control about him which I saw sadly lacking even in some numbers of my own family.” She came to the same realization that Goddard did: “I have a hunch that the Lord judges us, not so much by the color of skin we were born with, as by the way we conduct ourselves henceforth.” As she interacted with Nigerians, she became “convinced of their essential redeemability and fineness.” But it was a personal journey for Johnson, one she dismissed as “a bit of unwelcome philosophy” that she knew would make her family uneasy. Half-apologizing for her “unwelcome philosophy,”

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<sup>72</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to HARRISES, September 10, 1966, Box 3, fd. 11.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, September 17, 1966, Box 3, fd. 11.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, October 23, 1965, Box 3, fd. 9.

she moved on to talk about people “whom you like—the children.”<sup>75</sup>

By February 1966, war was on the horizon between the federal Nigerian government and the Eastern region of Biafra, where Mormonism had been flourishing. There had been a coup in the area; and while the Johnsons had heard of it, Sonia shrugged off the danger. Other whites were “astonished to see people sitting so nonchalantly in Lagos as if we weren’t all on top of an active volcano.”<sup>76</sup> In August 1966, she reassured her mother: “I don’t think we were ever in danger (except of being shot by accident, as a couple of expatriates were).”<sup>77</sup>

Similarly, the Johnsons were unaware of the Mormon congregations being formed by Anthony Obinna and others, since Lagos was relatively isolated from the difficulties. However, they had grown increasingly intimate with a Biafran man named Emeka Obi living in Lagos and had heard that President McKay was considering the possibility of sending missionaries to Lagos.<sup>78</sup> When she and Richard wrote to the First Presidency to encourage such a move, President Tanner wrote that, because of the coup, that “the proposed mission in Nigeria was being shelved indefinitely, and so not to proselyte actively at all, since the people couldn’t be baptized.” Perhaps “there’s some purpose in the whole business, maybe to try our testimonies but they’re getting stronger[,] so so far we’re passing the test.”<sup>79</sup>

When pondering sharing the gospel with Obi, she felt intimidated: “I’m a very bad missionary anyway, so this will be a good excuse for me.” Of course, she wanted to share the gospel, but she felt that she had “made such a mess of it so many times that I’m ready to give up in despair.” After all, she went on, “some people do more harm than good . . . and I seem to be one of them.” Maybe she would “help the Church . . . more by keeping my mouth shut.”<sup>80</sup>

Despite her misgivings, Nigeria opened doors for Sonia Johnson: “I certainly have a clearer picture of the world situation . . . than I ever would have obtained at home.” She envied the political savvy of

<sup>75</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to HARRISES, October 23, 1965, Box 3, fd. 9.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., November 28, 1966, Box 3, fd. 11. Although the writers are identified as both Richard and Sonia, Sonia clearly was the author.

<sup>77</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to HARRISES, August 6, 1966, Box 3, fd. 11.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., December 31, 1965, Box 3, fd. 9.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., February 5, 1966, Box 3, fd. 10.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., December 31, 1965, Box 3, fd. 9.

even the most ordinary Nigerian: “People here are very politics conscious and it’s the primary topic wherever we go.” When compared with “the rest of this bunch,” she felt like “an ignoramus.” She admitted, “I’ve certainly led a protected, uninformed, uninvolved life hence far. I’m feeling guilty about being so uninvolved in the life of all the other people who have lived and who are living on this globe.”<sup>81</sup>

But Nigeria succeeded in arousing in Johnson an awareness of the problem of race in the Mormon community and in America. On March 24, 1966, she experienced an epiphany while writing her mother: “It seems to me,” she wrote, “(this results from a complicated thought process I’ve just been through in the last few seconds) that this is the time of the world when the questions and problems of race are going to have to be faced squarely and realistically.” Johnson did not blame David O. McKay for failing to be more proactive: “It’s not President McKay’s function to deal with this.” But she knew that, sooner or later, some Church president “will receive some revelation about it.” Living in a black country had changed her: It “cause[d] one to ponder the question much more often and much more seriously than ever before.” Her friend, Emeka, was “one of the finest, most intelligent, most moral, most level-headed persons I’ve ever met in my whole life.” The priesthood ban “just doesn’t make sense to me.”<sup>82</sup>

Utah State University agricultural developer Evan Thompson told the *Ephraim Enterprise* after returning from his work as a foreign adviser to Tanzania that he needed to “have patience and be willing to admit that you sometimes might be wrong.” The *Enterprise* was in awe of Thompson’s tolerance and adaptability: “What would you do,” it asked readers in the opening sentences, “if you were the only white American in an area with an entire Negro population, serving under Negro bosses, and you were half-way around the world from your family?”<sup>83</sup>

The views of Cutler and Johnson indicate the kind of difficulties the Mormon people were facing head-on throughout the 1960s. Neither Cutler nor Johnson wanted to undermine Church leadership. Cutler had been happy to provide Church literature to the Ghanaian Saints; but when it came time to discuss establishing an official

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., July 16, 1966, Box 3, fd. 11.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., March 24, 1966, Box 3, fd. 10.

<sup>83</sup>“Evan Thompson Relives Life in Tanzania, East Africa,” *Ephraim Enterprise*, May 28, 1970, 7.

Church presence, she worried about what might happen. Like most Mormons, Cutler saw little point in teaching blacks enthusiastically when the optimism of new converts would collide squarely with the priesthood ban. Ultimately, she supported the institutional authority of the Church to dictate the policies of the Church, even as she begged Church members to expand their worldview.

Likewise, Johnson also hoped for a day when blacks could find a place within Mormonism; Nigeria convinced her of that. Living in a black country, she had ample evidence of Nigerians' "redeemability and fineness," but she would not defy the prophets. If something contradicted Joseph Fielding Smith's views, Johnson supported prophetic leadership with a simple "that's that." She did not expect McKay to take a role in changing the revelation, but she hoped that it would happen in the near future. A congregation in Eritrea retreated to a similar resolution when some priesthood holders "discussed teaching gospel to Eritrean people when requested." They sought counsel from Swiss Mission President William Erekson and "decided . . . to go ahead while making certain that they [black converts] understand they are not allowed to hold the priesthood for the curse of Ham."<sup>84</sup>

The Johnsons returned to the United States from Nigeria in 1967, settling into a comfortable life in Palo Alto, California. There, they enjoyed the lectures of Eugene England, then a Danforth Fellow of English literature at Stanford University. England's lectures enthralled Sonia and young Saints throughout Palo Alto. "His class is so enormous," she wrote her mother, "that people are bringing chairs from other rooms, sitting on the piano bench, sitting behind the room dividers, etc." England's knowledge of the Book of Mormon was so rich and his ability to teach so well-honed that Sonia "had no worry about his being on the 'fringe' of the Church." So moving was England's testimony that Sonia wryly noted: He "may even convince Rick to read the Book of Mormon (IMAGINE)."<sup>85</sup> Sonia remained a conservative Latter-day Saint. In early April 1965, she gushed to her mother about the Anthony Harvey film, *The Lion in Winter* starring Peter O'Toole. It was a "magnificent movie with hardly any sex at all," a left-handed compliment about the marriage of Henry II and his con-

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<sup>84</sup>Asmara [Eritrea] Branch, Melchizedek Priesthood Minutes, August 26, 1960, LR 10798, 13, LDS Church History Library.

<sup>85</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to Harrises, October 16, 1968, Box 1, fd. 13.

troversial queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, that had begun in adultery.<sup>86</sup>

In spring 1969 Richard received another opportunity to travel to Lagos. Excited about the opportunity, Sonia Johnson waited “for the Holy Ghost to give us some assurance.”<sup>87</sup> After they presumably received such spiritual assurance, they hurried to put her house in order. They hosted an Africa farewell party where G. Wesley Johnson, a Stanford-trained LDS historian of northern Africa (and co-founder of *Dialogue*), and his wife, Miriam, spoke. Sonia was impressed. The Johnsons were “young, vital, well-informed, and charming.”<sup>88</sup> But their departure was stonewalled when Nigeria clamped down on issuing visas to foreigners. By November their hopes for Africa were dashed. “Won’t be able to go to Lagos,” Sonia Johnson wrote with resignation. “Apparently, the Nigerians have cracked down on visitors because they suspect everyone of wanting to spy out the Biafran situation or sneak over to help them.”<sup>89</sup> Instead, the Johnsons took work in Malawi where Richard worked for USAID and Sonia taught English. “We love this country,” Sonia told her mother. “The people are gentle and obliging.”<sup>90</sup>

In Malawi, the race situation took on a new potency as she was exposed to large communities filled with interracial couples. She found the spectacle a sad one, rather than an enthralling one, characterizing it as “all the sad misfits of society—all shades of color.” The Johnsons were “the only all white couple, or all anything couple; everybody was mixed this and that.” Though they were “delightful people,” she read sorrow in their eyes: “They’ve no place in the world where they fit, except in each other’s homes.”<sup>91</sup> But this description was not an accurate representation of Sonia Johnson’s feelings. She had come to see Africa not only as part of the developing world but as the globe’s last best hope for preserving morality. The African children she taught “will be among the first not to be reared in the village traditions. . . . [W]hat will they offer their children instead?” She feared the consequences of Westernization: “I hope they manage

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., April 15, 1969, Box 1, fd. 14.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., January 5, 1969, Box 1, fd. 14.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., April 29, 1969, Box 1, fd. 14.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., November 6, 1969, Box 1, fd. 15.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., December 23, 1969, Box 1, fd. 15.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., February 15, 1970, Box 1, fd. 16.

better than the Western world has in clinging to some meaningful values." But she was alarmed to see that the African youth were enamored by "Western culture with all its acquisitiveness." Johnson worried that she would "see them discard the stabilizing beliefs and the ideas of their own remarkable cultures." But her apocalyptic worldview gave her a framework in which to interpret such behavior: "The whole world's going mad, so why should they be exempt?"<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile, life in Malawi seemed to be good for Richard: "He gets to be a better husband all the time, and father, and our relationship seems to improve the longer and harder we work together. He's remarkably humble for a perfect person."<sup>93</sup>

Paradigm shifts involve a multiplicity of forces on both the societal and individual levels. Johnson's racial awakening played a significant—but only one—role in her transformation into becoming the Mormon feminist *par excellence*. In July 1973, she admitted to her mother that Richard had been suffering from a bout of depression so severe that he seemed suicidal; institutionalization was a real possibility. But she felt confident of the hand of Providence: she had "never felt so contented, so capable, so sure of the Lord's care in my whole life."<sup>94</sup> And in spite of Richard's depressed moments, Sonia praised him: "He's such a good man, and kind and gentle and all other good things. He certainly deserves the blessings the Lord seems to pour out upon him and us, despite the fact that I don't. I'm sort of riding to the Kingdom on his coattails."<sup>95</sup>

In January 1975, she seemed to think Rick had worked through whatever had caused his season of faltering, telling her parents that he was "becoming more and more essential at work, everyone turns to him for answers, advice, and skill. . . . I believe he's enjoying work more, and I know he's doing a fine job for AIR [American Institute for Research]."<sup>96</sup> As late as June 1975, she continued to publicly take the Church's "separate spheres" approach to gender issues. In a letter to her parents, she approvingly quoted Spencer W. Kimball's criticism of "women's liberationists," expressed support for large Mor-

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to HARRISES, May 27, 1970, Box 1, fd. 16.

<sup>94</sup>Kellogg, "Shades of Gray," 83.

<sup>95</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to HARRISES, October 14, 1973, Box 1, fd. 19.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., January 12, 1975, Box 1, fd. 21.



mon families, and declared that sex didn't exist "just for the fun of it."<sup>97</sup> At this point, she was thirty-nine, and their fourth and final child was about two.<sup>98</sup>

From all appearances, Johnson's time in Africa, coupled perhaps with interactions in the more cosmopolitan communities in New Jersey and Washington, D.C., had hardened her resolve not to tolerate racial prejudice in herself and others. When the Johnsons were traveling through New Orleans on a camping trip, Sonia was grateful to note that her children did not seem to suffer from racial prejudice: "Eric strikes up black friendships at the schools where we stop. . . . I hate to think what would happen to the kids, though, if they lived in the south very long and went to school here and picked up the local ways of thinking and feeling." This comment was triggered by her observation that they were camping only a few miles from a Ku Klux Klan meeting lodge.<sup>99</sup>

Sonia continued to express faith in Mormonism, enthusiastically expressing hope that a new-made friend, Wendy, could become a Mormon. She "sent her [Wendy] a book of Mormon and this last Dialogue which she hadn't finished air mail the next week (the B.of M. with the best passages marked)." Wendy had "read McMurrin's [sic] Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion" and "a Dialogue on the Negro question (which is the best discussion I've ever seen anywhere)." Even though Wendy tired rapidly of the redundant phrasing in the Book of Mormon, Sonia was sure that if "she'll read what I marked," she would "get a feeling of what it might be when one gets past those superficial troubles." Sonia was convinced that "if anything converts her, it'll be Dialogue."<sup>100</sup>

In December Richard interviewed to teach with Tulane and Tuskegee Universities, both historically black universities.<sup>101</sup> Sonia expressed frustrations on occasion about Church members in their local wards being lackadaisical in scripture study and failing to engage the big questions. Sonia was "sure that's what the new teaching pro-

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., June 27, 1975, Box 1, fd. 21.

<sup>98</sup> Mary L. Bradford, "The Odyssey of Sonia Johnson," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1981): 18.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., December 9, 1975, Box 1, fd. 21.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., December 16, 1975, Box 1, fd. 21.

gram in the church would like to correct” but acknowledged that the Church would be “fighting the entire American culture” of “external motivation. . . . It’ll be slow going.”<sup>102</sup> Richard’s search for an academic job kept Sonia anxious for him. She especially hoped that Tulane would hire him. “I feel so very eager for Rich to find a soul-satisfying job. . . . The Church needs him in New Orleans, too, & me, & our kids, & we certainly need some church jobs & LDS companionship.”<sup>103</sup> The children were now old enough that suitable dating partners was a concern for this deeply involved mother, but countering it was the lingering dream of returning to Africa. A decade after their return, in October 1977, Rick took a trip to Africa and found that it triggered feelings of being “very homesick for it,” which Sonia shared. “It has entered our thoughts again to consider going there if we ever had a chance,” she confided. USAID wanted him to work on introducing computer programming and training in southern Africa, and Sonia felt torn. She would “want to go more than anybody if I didn’t have these children to worry about.”<sup>104</sup> When she learned about the “excellent schools” in Swaziland, her doubts seemed to be dispelled. The cold weather in Virginia made the move seem all the more appealing. “Africa doesn’t need anything to make it sound lovely. It IS lovely.”<sup>105</sup> They had, however, invested in a house, and selling or renting it posed difficulties. “[Rick’s] getting itchy feet to go to Africa and I would be, too, except for this house, which the children and I love so much.” So she prayed “desperately for some way to stay on here happily for Rick and also for something for me to do here.”<sup>106</sup>

That was late 1977, and one of the hot-button issues for the nation was the proposed Equal Rights Amendment: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.” Congress had passed it in 1972, and the clock was ticking on ratification by the states. Positive action by thirty-eight states was required, and thirty had done so by 1973. But then the drive for ratification lost momentum. Belatedly, in October 1976, the First Presidency praised the motives of ERA supporters but

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1973, Box 1, fd. 19.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., September 20, 1977, Box 1, fd. 23.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., October 26, 1977, Box 1, fd. 23.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., December 19, 1977, Box 1, fd. 23.

stated unequivocal opposition to the amendment as written. The ERA would lead to the breakdown of gender identity and attack the traditional family. “Injustices to women before the law and in society” should be “deplored” and remedied, it stated, but “there are better means for giving women, and men, the rights they deserve.”<sup>107</sup> In 1977, Sonia Johnson and a few friends organized Mormons for the ERA and mounted a national campaign supporting it that drew media attention, especially given her measured testimony before the Senate subcommittee in August 1979 that set Utah’s Senator Orrin Hatch back on his heels. The 1978 revelation on the priesthood, which threw open the door for priesthood ordination to worthy black men, fired Johnson’s zeal all the more. She saw the two cases as parallel. Church President Spencer W. Kimball, asked whether the elimination of race-based exclusion from the priesthood, was an early movement in the direction of eliminating gender-based exclusion, backed away hurriedly: “We pray to God to reveal his mind and we always will, but we don’t expect any revelation regarding women and the priesthood.”<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, the Johnson family was being pulled in different directions. During the spring and summer of 1978, Richard launched a lengthy trip, first to the Barbados to reinforce its school system and then, to Gbarnga, Liberia. This time, Sonia’s home was not part of this international service-mission. “I know you hate me,” Rick wrote. “This [separation] definitely is not the kind of life I want.”<sup>109</sup> He acknowledged that he “left at about the worst time possible.”<sup>110</sup> But he supported her ERA efforts, even recommending a “great book, ‘Taxpayer’s Guide to Effective Tax Revolt’ which also includes a good section on running your own organization such as Mormons for ERA.”<sup>111</sup>

In July 1978, Johnson “was converted heart and soul to the Equal

<sup>107</sup> “Church Leaders Reaffirm ERA Stand,” *Deseret News*, August 26, 1978, 2.

<sup>108</sup> “Not for Women,” *Deseret News*, June 13, 1978, B4.

<sup>109</sup> Richard Johnson, Letter to Ada Johnson, March 6, 1979, and Richard Johnson, Letter to Sonia Johnson, April 12, 1979, Box 42, fd. 14.

<sup>110</sup> Richard Johnson, Letter to “Soni Lu, scooby doo, booby two, EdD,” Box 42, fd. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Richard Johnson, Letter to Sonia Johnson, April 15, 1979, Box 42,

Rights Amendment” when she and 100,000 other activists marched publicly for Congress to extend the extension of time to ratify the amendment, “seven years having proved too little time for such a revolutionary concept as legal equality to be properly understood by the country.”<sup>112</sup> Feeling alienated from her husband and her church, she could “feel almost all of my feelings of loyalty and caring centered on women, pulled away from male gods and institutions.”<sup>113</sup>

In September 1979, Johnson did the unthinkable for a Mormon woman: She accused Kimball and his obedient followers of seeking to “impos[e] the prophet’s moral directives upon all Americans, and they may succeed if Americans do not become aware of their methods and goals.”<sup>114</sup> She claimed that during one of her pro-ERA demonstrations, she was attacked by BYU students who “tried to tear down our MORMONS FOR ERA banner.” Sonia drew on the lingering perception of racism in the Mormonism, claiming that the students “solemnly vowed that if the Prophet told them to go out and shoot all black people, they would do so without hesitation.”<sup>115</sup>

Even more shockingly to Mormon ears, she told ERA supporters in the American public “not to listen to the missionaries until the Mormon leaders listen to them.”<sup>116</sup> She later acknowledged that she might have been “intemperate . . . in some of my public remarks concerning the Church” but defended her comments as being made “in true lobbying mode.”<sup>117</sup> Her bishop, Jeffrey Willis, would not tolerate Johnson’s “lobbying.” Utah Governor Scott Matheson and Salt Lake City Mayor Ted Wilson both actively supported ratification without

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fd. 14.

<sup>112</sup>Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1998), 375.

<sup>113</sup>Sonia Johnson, qtd. in Kellogg, “Shades of Gray,” 84.

<sup>114</sup>Peter Gillins, “Mormon Women’s Rights Issue,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, February 8, 1980, D1.

<sup>115</sup>Sonia Johnson, “Patriarchal Panic: Sexual Politics in the Mormon Church,” quoted in Gloria M. Boone and Edward J. Harris, *Rhetoric Argument and Communication* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1985), 160.

<sup>116</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to Earl Rouche, December 23, 1979, Box 3, fd. 4.

<sup>117</sup>Sonia Johnson, Letter to Spencer W. Kimball, April 22, 1980, and

threats to their membership.<sup>118</sup> She had stepped over a line, even though her bishop acknowledged that “other members of the Church who also supported ERA” had done so without putting “their membership in question.”<sup>119</sup> In December, was excommunicated by a bishop’s court. Richard stood beside her, displaying only staunch commitment: “I completely support her stand against the reprehensible covert attempts by the LDS Church to deny women equal rights,” he wrote in a letter to Bishop Willis. “I did and said the same as Sonia, as well as contributed my last year’s tithing to the Mormons for the ERA.” Richard shuddered at the “savage misogyny” Willis “demonstrated during the trial and since.”<sup>120</sup>

Johnson’s home teacher, attorney Michael Barrett, discussed the case with the stake president, Earl Rouche, and reported to Sonia that Rouche “sounds concerned about the Bishop’s sanction” and was “interested in giving you a fair shake.”<sup>121</sup> But when Sonia appealed Willis’s decision, Rouche supported Willis. The next step in the appeal process was to the First Presidency. “I do not believe that you would choose to affirm the use of the harsh and repressive measures that others may have innocently but erroneously applied in your defense,” she implored. “You are a Prophet of God and a servant of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are guided by higher standards of justice and mercy.”<sup>122</sup> The First Presidency declined to change the verdict.

In some regards, the “Housewife to Heretic” narrative Johnson crafted as her autobiographical statement in public closely matched the documentary record she has left. But a factor often omitted from this narrative of internal American politics is the role that Africa

Sonia Johnson, Letter to Earl Rouche, December 23, 1979, both in Box 3, fd. 4.

<sup>118</sup> Peter Gillins, “Mormon Women’s Rights Issue,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, February 8, 1980, D1.

<sup>119</sup> Jeffrey Willis, Letter to Sonia Johnson, December 5, 1979, Box 3, fd. 4.

<sup>120</sup> Richard Johnson, Letter to Jeffrey Willis, December 11, 1979, Box 3, fd. 2.

<sup>121</sup> Transcript of conversation with Michael Barrett, n.d. Box 3, fd. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Sonia Johnson, Letter to Spencer W. Kimball, April 22, 1980, Box 3, fd. 4.

played in Sonia Johnson's personal transformation. Africa had exposed Johnson to a world outside the Mormon corridor. Though raised in an environment in which her father made no secret of his distaste for blacks, she had encountered blacks for herself, dealt with them as human beings, and diminished her father's racism, a position that was unequivocally supported by the 1978 revelation extending ordination to worthy black men. Africa allowed Johnson to immerse herself in the discourse and culture of a people vastly different from her own. While the new environment did not prompt her to question Church authority with the same principle-based firmness that would define her ERA campaign, it was in Africa where she began questioning religious policies that didn't "make a lot of sense" to her. When Sonia Johnson first learned of the Church's opposition to the ERA in 1976, she "knew instantly what the women's movement was all about; I knew it in my very bones."<sup>123</sup> She "realized that I had confused the church leaders with God."<sup>124</sup> The black experience in Africa had broadened Sonia's vision, and feminism had focused it. As Heather Kellogg has observed, "She saw her past through the colored lens of the present and reinterpreted her history in accordance with her new views."<sup>125</sup> The germs of Sonia Johnson's resistance to the Mormon hierarchy's policies dated back—not to her exposure to feminist literature—but to her discontent with Mormonism's racial discourse.

And the concerns that disturbed Sonia Johnson were also growing throughout the body of American Mormons. Mormon expatriates to Africa learned that black geographic space could influence their conceptions of race and ethnicity. For the next decade, other American Mormons also found themselves changing their perspective when visiting black spaces. James E. Faust had been exposed to black Brazilians during his mission in the late 1930s and was troubled by the strictures that confined his preaching to European immigrants. In the 1970s, Faust, now the International Mission president and a Kennedy appointee for a federal commission on civil rights,

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<sup>123</sup> Sonia Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981), 107.

<sup>124</sup> Lisa Cronin Wahl, "A Feminist Latter-day Saint: Why Sonia Johnson Won't Give Up the ERA," quoted in Jensen and Hammerback, "Feminists of Faith," 125.

<sup>125</sup> Kellogg, "Shades of Gray," 85.

told the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve that blacks, Europeans, and all the mixtures in-between were laying the foundation of the Sao Paulo Temple together. Blacks “make blocks for the temple just like anybody else,” Faust declared. “They have made their monetary contributions for the construction of the temple and they’ve made their sacrifices just the same as everybody else.”<sup>126</sup> Black space had the power to lift white Mormons from their five generations of white incarceration.

The constellation of forces that created the environment in which the 1978 revelation was a web of factors: the pull of African Mormons, the commitment of black Brazilian Mormons, and even the possibilities of legal action from the Internal Revenue Service. But a central player in the drama was the redemptive tug of African Mormonism. As Phillip Jenkins pointed out in 2011, for the past two generations, Christianity—and certainly Mormonism—has experienced a southward and eastward shift. Unlike Central and South American Mormonism, which was founded largely on the extension of U.S. religious thought throughout the Latin world, African Mormonism represented the first instance in which an indigenous group embraced Mormonism on its own terms, sought out the Mormon hierarchy on its own terms, and expressed an expectation of equality that the Mormon Church scrambled to find answers to.

The experience of Mormon expatriates reveals, however, that while Intermountain Mormondom had locked itself into an entrenched war against civil rights legislation, Mormon expatriates had become a racial minority, forced to assess racism from that perspective and revisit the artificially crafted racial consensus based on nondoctrinally based folk beliefs.

#### **THE ROOTS OF THE MORMON-AFRICA CONNECTION (1972–79)**

But why did it require a continent two thousand miles away to convince Mormons of a problem that they had lived with—at least in some measure—for over 125 years? At the same time that David O. McKay felt that the 1964 Civil Rights Act was wrong, he held high hopes for the Church’s contribution to Nigerian Mormon communities, including such infrastructure as building schools and hospitals.

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<sup>126</sup> James E. Faust, qtd. in Mark L Grover, “The Mormon Priesthood Revelation and the Sao Paulo, Brazil Temple,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 47.

Mormons were not unaware of the evils of physical displacement. In 1838, Missouri Governor Lilburn W. Boggs ordered the state militia (which ended up being anyone with a gun) to oust the Mormon population from Missouri. As the Saints were driven from their homes throughout the 1830s, Missourians hurled epithets at the white believers, calling them “black Mormons” who had no place among freedom-loving Americans.<sup>127</sup>

In 1969 the lingering scars from Missouri convinced such highly placed Mormon leaders as N. Eldon Tanner and Hugh B. Brown that Mormons could empathize with the black American experience. Outspoken black civil rights advocates like Darius Gray and Ruffin Bridgforth pushed for civil rights, but in general, the streets of Salt Lake City saw no mass marches and no black power.

But Africa was different. For generations, the Mormon community has been immersed in creating histories, weaving personal and family histories into the larger community narrative. Autobiographies, biographical sketches, meeting minutes, and correspondence exist in abundance for even routine affairs, isolated people, and ordinary communities. Mormonism’s foundational text, the Book of Mormon, is, at its heart, a historical narrative of a people chosen by God and then led astray by the false “traditions of their fathers.” Though Mormons considered American Indians as “cursed” because of their ancestors’ disobedience, they were a people that Mormons thought they knew and understood and whose redemption they anticipated.

When Alex Haley’s book, *Roots* (New York: G. K. Hall and Company, 1976) was published, Mormons—and most of white America—lapped up the story. Haley claimed to trace his family’s history back to Gambia in the early days of the slave trade. So popular was the story that Utah State University arranged for Dr. William F. Lye, a USU academic dean and a well-regarded historian of Africa, to offer a course based on the book and its spin-off television miniseries—an equally wild success. Lye himself authored one of the LDS Church’s first articles on black Africa in 1980.<sup>128</sup> In February 1978, Lye helped to produce a fifteen-part television series, “The Roots of Black Americans,”

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<sup>127</sup>Quoted in Russell Stevenson, “‘A Negro Preacher’: The Worlds of Elijah Ables,” *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 181. See also T. Ward Frampton

<sup>128</sup>“Afro-American Course Offered by SUCCE [Southern Utah Com-



broadcast on a local Utah channel.<sup>129</sup> The Church openly embraced Haley when Brigham Young University arranged for him to speak at a university forum in 1972 and awarded him an honorary PhD in 1977.<sup>130</sup>

But Haley's appeal had less to do with his blackness than with his African-ness. African Americans enjoyed no such privilege among Mormon communities. Lacking a written record and a history, however fantastic, African Americans existed in a lacuna of Mormon theology. Blacks had no chosen land or chosen history they could claim. More than most American Christian denominations, Mormonism values space as a receptacle for spirituality. A chosen people should have a land, Mormon theology maintains. The Israelites conquered Canaan. The Nephites sent expeditions to conquer "the land of anti-Nephi Lehi," their inheritance. Joseph Smith dreamed of Zion in Missouri, a physical reclamation of the Garden of Eden. Brigham Young led the Saints to the Great Basin. Where was the Canaan of African Americans? Nowhere to be found. However strange white Mormons felt Africans were, at least the Africans could tell you where their great-grandparents had been born. Africans exercised self-sovereignty over a land where their stewardship extended for generations backward past history. African Americans had been kidnapped by history, wanderers in a land foreign to their own. At least, this is how the Mormon psyche of mid-twentieth-century America coped with blackness.

### CONCLUSION

Twentieth-century Mormonism has been often cast as the model American religion. Expansionistic, nationalistic, and overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon, Mormons owned this image for much of the twentieth century. But it was an image that the Mormons themselves could not uphold. Strong though the American Mormons considered their religious infrastructure to be, its façade of whiteness

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munity College Extension],” *Times Independent* (Moab, Utah), February 24, 1977, A4; William F. Lye, “From Burundi to Zaire: Taking the Gospel to Africa,” *Ensign*, March 1980, 10–15.

<sup>129</sup>“Get College Credits Via TV—watch ‘Roots,’” *Vernal Express*, January 13, 1977, 5.

<sup>130</sup>J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the Public Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 67.

would inevitably be eroded when confronted by globalism. In September 1978, Anthony Obinna, still unaware of the Official Declaration announced three months earlier that granted priesthood ordination to worthy black men, wrote the First Presidency: "The Spirit of God calls us to abide by this church and there is nothing to keep us out."<sup>131</sup>

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the white Mormon racial consensus had woven itself into an intricate tapestry, one so layered and complex that it required a multiplicity of variables to unravel it. White American Mormons would come to feel that they had the commission to redeem America; but Africans made it clear that it was they who would teach Mormon Americans how to be Christian.

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<sup>131</sup>Anthony Obinna, Letter to First Presidency, September 28, 1978, Edwin Cannon Correspondence, LDS Church History Library.

## REVIEWS

Beth Shumway Moore. *Bones in the Well: The Haun's Mill Massacre, 1838: A Documentary History*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012. 196 pp. Bibliography, index. Paperback: \$19.95; ISBN: 9780-80-614-2708.

*Reviewed by Brent M. Rogers*

On October 30, 1838, more than two hundred Missouri militiamen attacked the Haun's Mill<sup>1</sup> settlement located on Shoal Creek in Caldwell County, Missouri, where some forty Mormon families lived. The Missouri militia opened fire on the small community, shooting into the small crevices of the blacksmith's shop in which several Mormon men and boys had taken refuge. They then entered the building to execute more. At the end of the horrific slaughter, seventeen Mormons lay dead in pooled blood, another fourteen were wounded, and many others had fled or hid in the woods. It was the violent crescendo of the 1838 Mormon War in Missouri and what historian Will Bagley has labeled "a straight-up criminal atrocity" (179).

Beth Shumway Moore, a career elementary school teacher and award-winning author with a graduate degree in English from the University of Utah, has compiled many of the most interesting, heart-wrenching, distressing, and traumatic first-hand accounts of the Haun's Mill Massacre in this book. Moore presents a good balance of perspectives including male and female

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander L. Baugh's research updates the spelling of Jacob's last name as "Hawn," not "Haun." I use "Haun" in this review, however, for consistency with Moore's book. See Alexander L. Baugh, "Jacob Hawn and the Hawn's Mill Massacre: Missouri Millwright and Oregon Pioneer," *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 1-26.

voices, as well as accounts from participants and survivors who were both youth and adults at the time of the tragedy.

*Bones in the Well* begins with an excellent foreword by Will Bagley in which he situates the Haun's Mill atrocity among other frontier massacres, riots, and violence. Bagley expressively ends his prefatory comments by stating, "The bones in the well at the site of the Haun's Mill massacre teach us much and give us even more to ponder about fear, hatred, and religion. Let us hope they show the futility of vengeance and give us hope that there is justice and mercy in the eternities" (11). Moore then adds a brief introduction that provides historical context for the documentary accounts that follow. The fifteen chapters that constitute the remainder of the book contain Moore's pithy introductions to and transcriptions of the individual documents. An epilogue that attempts to draw meaning for the event ends the book.

The introduction displays Moore's literary talents but provides little research documentation and no new interpretive, analytical, or factual insights on the massacre's milieu. The reader would find greater utility in pairing the primary accounts found in Moore's work with other secondary studies on the 1838 Mormon War in Missouri for a better understanding of the tragedy's larger context. Some of the works to consult include Alexander L. Baugh, *A Call to Arms: The 1838 Mormon Defense of Northern Missouri* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2000); Stephen C. LeSueur, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987); Leland H. Gentry and Todd M. Compton, *Fire and Sword: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Northern Missouri, 1836–39* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2010); and Clark V. Johnson, ed., *Missouri Redress Petitions: Documents of the 1833–1838 Missouri Conflict* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992).

The book's introduction ends with Moore stating her methodology for selecting the documents or excerpts included in the book. The accounts are to be eyewitness or first-hand because, as Moore states, "Who better to tell the tale than those who were there? Their stories, preserved in journals and reminiscences, have survived through the years. The gathering of these accounts gives immediacy to the recounting of the tragedy" (26). Many of the accounts, however, do not follow this methodology. They are not documents from people who were directly involved in that calamity in late October 1838. There are several secondary sources, including the document in the first chapter of the book and several accounts in the "Interesting Bits and Pieces" chapter. For example, the first document in the book's first chapter is an early secondary history written by Burr Joyce, the pen name for Major Return S. Holcombe, a prolific Missouri writer. Holcombe, however, was not a participant in or survivor of the massacre. His account is written from official documents and other records, from affidavits of witnesses, and from statements made by actual participants. The text of the newspaper, from which Moore transcribes the docu-

ment, contains an introductory statement to Holcombe's account, which states that what follows is from the pen of a man "not connected" with events and one who can dispassionately view the massacre (28). Moore does not indicate why she chose to include an early secondary account of the Haun's Mill Massacre other than to quote Harold Schindler who called Holcombe's history "the best single account of the massacre" (27). Given Moore's selection criterion, however, its inclusion in the book is questionable.

Other documents or excerpts found in *Bones in the Well* are also problematic. In the Isaac Laney chapter, Moore includes a statement from a grandson of Laney's, thus, two generations removed from the event (133). The "Interesting Bits and Pieces" chapter, described by Moore as "a variety of snippets from multiple sources containing interesting facts and miscellaneous short items or journal excerpts about some of the participants in the massacre," also includes excerpts from secondary sources (79). For instance, Moore presents a portion of a film review written by Jerald and Sandra Tanner of the movie *Legacy*, which contains no information about any of the participants of the massacre—only later thoughts on the event by Joseph Fielding Smith and Michael Quinn (86–87). Moore provides no rationale for including this secondary statement. Such inclusions are not methodologically sound and only bewilder a reader.

Still, most of the documents do meet Moore's selection methodology. Some of the more detailed and gripping accounts come from survivors Nathan Kinsman Knight, Amanda Barnes Smith, and Isaac Laney, as well as from the Hammer family. Moore also presents accounts from Joseph Young, Artemisia Sidnie Myers, Ellis and Olive Eames, David Lewis, and Margaret Foutz, all of whom were present when the tragedy occurred or observed its aftermath. Knight's account provides a disturbing window into the events of October 30, 1838. For example, Knight stated, "At the Blacksmith shop they had killed Bro. Warren Smith and one of his sons and wounded the other. The boys were under the bellows pleading for their lives. The mob put their guns thru between the logs and fired blowing the top of one of the boys heads off and mangling the other's thigh terribly. They shouted, 'Kill them, damn them, kill them. Knits make lice'" (112). Isaac Laney's account describes how he "scaped by flight shot four times clear through the body and once across each arm, 27 bullet holes in my shirt, 12 in the stock of my gun" (132).

Foutz's account provides a glimpse into the frightful experience of many women: "We ran about three miles into the woods, and there huddled together, spreading what few blankets or shawls we chanced to have on the ground for the children; and here we remained until two o'clock the next morning, before we heard anything of the result of the firing at the mill. Who can imagine our feelings during this dreadful suspense? And when the news did come, oh! What terrible news! Fathers, brothers and sons, inhumanly

butchered!" (162–63). Remembering the brutal event for Olive Eames made her "poor old heart ache" (138). By collecting these accounts and publishing them together, Moore's documentary history helps the reader understand the intimate details of the most shocking and painful event of the Mormons' Missouri experiment.

The book contains some blemishes in its presentation and production. One flaw is with the book's typographical style. Italics are used throughout the book and, according to Moore, are supposed to denote the editor's voice to differentiate her words from the original documents (26). At the beginning of most chapters, the reader will find a short vignette in italics, which one would assume are written by Moore given the italicized font. However, the words in those few lines are always from the text of the document they precede, and not from Moore. This irregularity in italics is awkward and confusing (49, 71, 93, 103, 109, 117, 127, 137, 149, 161, 165). There are other discrepancies as well. For example, in the chapter on survivors Ellis and Olive Eames's experience, Moore states, "Research reveals that Olive Ames, as her name is given in the first account, is actually Olive Eames" (137). However, she neglects to provide the research that led to this finding and, in her epilogue, spells the name "Olive Ames" despite her earlier correction (180). Ultimately, it is surprising to see a book with so many mechanical flaws published by a usually reputable university press.

While the accounts selected largely tell the story from the perspective of those who experienced it, Moore goes beyond the documents by attempting to tie the legacy of Haun's Mill directly to the Mountain Meadows Massacre (177–79). "The little-known event that occurred on 30 October 1838, at Haun's Mill, Missouri," Moore writes, "is perhaps only a footnote in that larger story, but it looms large in the tumultuous events that shaped the attitudes and beliefs of the nineteenth-century adherents called Mormons" (15–16). Moore's epilogue draws, as her main conclusion of the October 1838 tragedy, that it and the violent trials that Mormons faced in the 1830s and 1840s "left a deep scar on the psyche of the Latter-day Saints. That scar was still fresh in their minds when the Fancher emigrant party, traveling to California through Utah, met their fate at Mountain Meadows in southern Utah in 1857. . . . And in many ways this cumulative history finally exploded in the Mountain Meadows massacre in southern Utah on September 11, 1857, when the Mormons, had, in turn, become the militia" (179–80). Although this connection may well be psychologically sound, the documents presented, the concise introductions, and the scarce research found in the footnotes do not develop the interpretive framework necessary to make such a sweeping and bold assertion. The documents Moore includes in her book do not advance that thesis. The unfounded causal claim between the Haun's Mill Massacre and the later Mountain Meadows Massacre is a bridge too far for the documents Moore se-

lected to depict the many facets of the immediate Haun's Mill tragedy.

Moore's book is, nevertheless, a contribution to Mormon history and to the history of American frontier violence. It offers readers a chance to study the words and experiences of those who lived through a traumatic western event. In the 175 years since the slaughter at the mill occurred, this is the only book that has attempted in any singular fashion to outline the documents specifically connected to that tragedy. Moore's book provides a ready reference to those most pertinent primary accounts from participants and survivors of the massacre. That is what makes this book valuable and useful.

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W. Paul Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen, eds. *Between Pulpit and Pew: The Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011. x, 243 pp. Selected bibliography (no notes) and index. Paperback: \$26.05; ISBN: 978-0-87421-838-1

*Reviewed by Mark Ashurst-McGee*

In *Between Pulpit and Pew*, editors Paul W. Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen compile an interesting collection of essays that lie between the disciplines of history and folklore. In truth, the essays hew much more closely on the history (pulpit?) side than out in the pews, the domain of the folklorist, and the front matter bears out this division. The foreword by Elaine Thatcher attempts to define folklore, but there is no attempt to distinguish it from the fields of anthropology, cultural studies, or popular culture—or even from cultural history.

Reeve and Van Wagenen concede that they and the other authors “are all historians, not folklorists” (3). Nevertheless, a book that aims at an intersection with folkore scholarship should account more for the literature of the field. They draw on Linda Dégh, but not on Stith Thompson or Barre Toelken. There is no reference to work on religious folklore generally, such as Barbara Walker's collection *Out of the Ordinary: Folklore and Supernatural* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1995). There is no reference to folklorist David J. Hufford's experience-centered approach to the study of supernat-

ural belief.<sup>1</sup> As for Mormon folklore, Reeve and Van Wagenen reference the work of William (“Bert”) Wilson but do not mention the pioneering work of Austin and Alta Fife before him or of Eric A. Eliason’s contemporary contributions.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Reeve and Van Wagenen begin their introduction to the book by drawing on the work of astronomy popularizer Carl Sagan, and his sharp—many folklorists and even historians would say naive—distinction between “the superstitious mind and the critical mind” (1–5). They seem to tacitly accept this view and conclude by noting that, even today, “humanity still engages in a balancing act between the scientific and supernatural mind to understand an often mysterious world” (16). Many if not most folklorists would find this mutual exclusivity problematic. For example, folklorist Timothy C. Lloyd has warned against drawing this distinction between what is natural and what is supernatural. He holds that for most humans, the supernatural “is not a separate, exotic, largely closed realm; rather, it is connected to, or underlies, all life. It is supernatural not in the sense of being unnatural or in being separate from the natural, but in the literal sense of being the largest version of the pattern of the natural.”<sup>3</sup> The editors draw on the work of folklorists Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi regarding the legend process and treat it as the key to all folklore (10). The legend, however, is only one of the many genres of folklore that folklorists study. But enough of this methodological grouching. Reeve and Van Wagenen contend that Joseph Smith created an “open and spiritually rich cosmology” in which the Mormon people found “ample room” to develop a variety of supernatural legends (4–5, see also 14, 16), and the essays in their collection bear this out.

The volume consists of the preface and introduction just mentioned, as well as seven original contributions. W. Paul Reeve contributes his own chapter

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<sup>1</sup>For an explanation of this approach, see Hufford’s series of articles in *New York Folklore*: “Traditions of Disbelief,” 8, nos. 3–4 (Winter 1982): 47–55; “The Supernatural and the Sociology of Knowledge: Explaining Academic Belief,” 9, nos. 3–4 (Winter 1983): 21–29; and “Reason, Rhetoric, and Religion: Academic Ideology versus Folk Belief,” 11, nos. 1–4 (1985): 177–94. For applications of this approach, see Hufford, *The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions*, Publications of the American Folklore Society (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982); and Hufford, “Beings Without Bodies: An Experience-Centered Theory of the Belief in Spirits,” in Walker, *Out of the Ordinary*, 11–45.

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, Austin and Alta Fife, *Saints of Sage and Saddle* (1956; rpt., Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980), and Eric A. Eliason, *The J. Golden Kimball Stories* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup>Timothy C. Lloyd, “Folklore, Foodways, and the Supernatural,” in Walker, *Out of the Ordinary*, 60.



“As Ugly as Evil’ and ‘As Wicked as Hell’: Gadianton Robbers and the Legend Process among the Mormons,” while Michael Scott Van Wagenen contributes his own piece on “Singular Phenomena: The Evolving Mormon Interpretation of Unidentified Flying Objects.” Matthew Bowman offers two chapters: “A Mormon Bigfoot: David Patten’s Cain and the Conception of Evil in LDS Folklore” and “Raising the Dead: Mormons, Evangelicals, and Miracles in America.” There is also a chapter by Kevin Cantera on “A Currency of Faith: Taking Stock in Utah County’s Dream Mine” and a chapter by Stanley J. Thayne on “Walking on Water: Nineteenth-Century Prophets and a Legend of Religious Imposture.” Finally, there is a short piece by Alan L. Morrell on the legend of the Bear Lake monster: “A Nessie in Mormon Country.”

Matthew Bowman begins the main body of the work with a scholarly analysis of the story told of Mormon apostle David Patten’s encounter with the biblical Cain. An early biography of Patten recounts that, while he was riding alone, he was approached by a large hairy creature who introduced itself as Cain. Bowman furnishes other early sources and adds more recent folklore items. The story has been told again and again, taking on aspects of American Bigfoot folklore. Bowman needed more critical emphasis on the widespread influence of Spencer W. Kimball’s *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, which quoted the story as told in Patten’s biography.<sup>4</sup> However, Bowman provides keen analysis and an interesting reading of a transformation of the Cain legend in Mormon history, arguing that the legend’s ability to shed racial connotations and incorporate Bigfoot lore while remaining distinctly Mormon indicates Mormonism’s cultural vitality. Bowman’s second contribution to the collection, an essay on the synthesis of evangelical charisma and enlightenment rationalism through the lens of Mormon healing practice, is somewhat similarly argued.

W. Paul Reeve’s own contribution, on the Gadianton robber legends of southern Utah, is clearly situated between the pulpit and the pew. On the one hand, it draws on prescriptive Mormon scripture (the Book of Mormon) and the statements of Church authorities (Brigham Young and several apostles), while on the other, it draws on sources from ordinary Latter-day Saints (settlers of southern Utah). These early Mormons circulated beliefs that the spirits of the Gadianton robbers—the arch-villains in the Book of Mormon—inhabited the mountains of the region that became Utah Territory and plagued the Mormon settlements. The quotations from his source material show clearly that the evil spirits were associated with the mountains. Yet the Latter-day Saints of Utah also extolled the virtues of their mountain home and in fact anchored their sacred geography in mountains. The Rocky Mountains were seen

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<sup>4</sup>Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 127–28.

as the “everlasting hills” of Genesis 49:26. The Wasatch Range constituted the new-world “mountains of Ephraim” (Judges 3:27). The Great Salt Lake valley’s Ensign Peak was the “mountain of the Lord’s house” prophesied by Isaiah (2:3) and the Mount Zion of the Americas. So the mountains that made Utah the Mormon Zion were also the strongholds of evil spirits. No reconciliation for this apparent contradiction is offered. Perhaps there is no reconciliation to be had. Reeve does provide excellent documentation for these stories and their historical trajectory, arguing that they provided an explanation for struggling and failed settlements in southern Utah. As for northern Utah, the compilation includes a very brief chapter by Alan L. Morrell on the folklore of the Bear Lake monster.

Michael Scott Van Wagenen’s contribution looks at the early Mormon doctrine of other inhabited worlds in God’s grand creation and its influence on Mormon response to the UFO craze of the mid-to-late twentieth century. Van Wagenen begins in the pulpit, citing LDS prophets ranging from Joseph Smith to Nathan Tanner, and even references material from official Church magazines. He then goes from the pulpit into the pews, then out into the foyer, out onto the meetinghouse grounds, and far beyond—analyzing sources ranging from post-Mormon UFO clubbies to non-Mormon Utahns. Its scope is impressive, but the actual number of stories documenting folk beliefs of ordinary Latter-day Saints is quite skimpy. Still, Van Wagenen argues that the Mormon doctrine of multiple inhabited worlds helped the Saints to incorporate UFO stories in a way that many Christians, believing the earth to be a uniquely peopled planet, could not. He takes this phenomenon as an example of Joseph Smith’s expansive cosmology, lending an enduring vitality to Mormon belief in a changing world.

Kevin Cantera’s essay on Utah Valley’s dream mine does a better job of getting into the pews. His analysis consists of two main bodies of sources. The first is the writings of fundamentalist Mormons Ogden Kraut and Norman Pierce. Kraut’s and Pierce’s books on the dream mine are presented as collections of the stories that had been passed down among the believers in John Koyle’s dreams regarding the mine; and to a degree, this is true. At the same time, he admits that Kraut and Pierce consciously shaped their narratives to make John Koyle’s quest for gold and Nephite treasure parallel Joseph Smith’s quest for the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. Kraut and Pierce were synthesizers and popularizers as much or more as they were folklore repositories. Cantera’s second body of sources is the internet and more particularly the Yahoo! discussion group used by dream mine believers. Here Cantera takes us into the new frontier of folklore studies, where the computer brings people together in a new way and where a scholar can track or even witness the process of story development in a lively post’s register of comments. Richard Bushman, in his biography of Joseph Smith, argues that Smith was *living* the

Bible. As he states in one passage: “More than restoring the New Testament church, the early Mormons believed they were resuming the biblical narrative in their own time.”<sup>5</sup> In a similar fashion, Cantera shows that investors and laborers in the dream mine are *living* the Restoration.

The compilation concludes with a strong piece by Stanley J. Thayne on the legend of Joseph Smith attempting to walk on water (and failing). Thayne demonstrates a genuine engagement with folklore theory and utilization of folklore methodology. He successfully blends historical sources—including several newspaper articles and other printed sources—with traditional folklore sources—including items collected by Austin and Alta Fife in the mid-twentieth century and his own considerable fieldwork in the early twenty-first century. Thayne shows that Joseph Smith was not the first prophet against whom this legend was deployed—although Smith’s audacity and success as a religious leader meant that he would provoke the most circulation of the legend. The story was used by people within Smith’s areas of residence (or former residence) to rationalize their rejection of his prophetic claims. Like other essays in the volume, Thayne’s shows how legends functioned, although in this case for non-Mormons.

For a serious engagement between Mormon history and folklore we have much further to go. However, *Between Pulpit and Pew* is a good step forward.

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Eric A. Eliason and Tom Mould, eds. *Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Studies*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013. xii, 591 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. Paper: \$34.95; ISBN 978-1-60781-284-5

*Reviewed by Ronda Walker Weaver*

Eric A. Eliason and Tom Mould, in *Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Studies*, bring together the works of twenty-five folklorists from across the United States to discuss LDS folklore from its status in the mid-nineteenth century to the contemporary LDS Church of the early twenty-first century.

This anthology begins with a thorough introduction to the study of LDS

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<sup>5</sup>See for example, Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 142.

folklore and its scholars and is then divided into six sections, with a comprehensive overview regarding the history and the topic's relevance preceding each themed section. These introductions become the "theory" that is then applied to the ways of the Mormon folk in each article.

Folklorist William A. ("Bert") Wilson, divides folklore into three areas: Make (Material), Say (Verbal), and Do (Customary).<sup>1</sup> Using a similar pattern, Eliason and Mould also divide their book into six areas, under which are grouped the following chapters:

1. Mormon Society, Symbols, and Landscapes: "Utah Mormons," "The Mormon Landscape: Definition of an Image in the American West," "The Beehive in Utah Folk Art," "Hay Derricks of the Great Basin and Upper Snake River Valley," and "Mormon Gravestones: A Folk Expression of Identity and Belief."

2. Mormon Customs and Traditions: "A Mormon from Cradle to the Grave," "Now That I've Kissed the Ground You Walk On: A Look at Gender in Creative Date Invitations," "Marriage Confirmation Narratives among Mormons," "Nameways in the Latter-day Saint History, Custom, and Folklore," and "The Beehive Buffet."

3. Mormon Beliefs in the Sacred and Supernatural: "Early Mormon 'Magic': Insights from Folklore and from Literature," "Freeways, Parking Lots, and Ice Cream Stands," "The Three Nephites in Contemporary Society: Transformations of Power: Women's Visionary Narratives," "Narratives of Personal Revelation among Latter-day Saints," and "The Great and Dreadful Day: Mormon Folklore of the Apocalypse."

4. Mormon History and Its Heroes: "Fate and the Persecutors of Joseph Smith: Transmutations of an American Myth," "Pioneers and Recapitulation in Mormon Popular Historical Expression," "Orrin Porter Rockwell: The Modern Samson," "The Ballad of the 'Mormon Meadows Massacre,'" and "Portraits in Song: Gleaning from the Brigham Young Folk Song Cycle."

5. Mormon Humor: "As the Saints Go Marching By: Modern Jokelore Concerning Mormons," "Sanpete County Humor: The Tales and the Tellers," "For Time and Eternity: BYU Coed Jokes and the Seriousness of Mormon Humor," and "Heirarch and Mule-skinner: A Selection from *Mormon Country*."

6. Mormon Lore in an International Context: "On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries," "'Gringo Jeringo': Anglo Mormon Missionary Culture in Bolivia," "'Of Course, in Guatemala, Bananas Are Better,'" "Exotic and Familiar Eating Experiences of Mormon Missionaries," and "Mormonism, the Maori, and Cultural Authenticity."

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<sup>1</sup>William A. Wilson, *The Marrow of Human Experience: Essays on Folklore* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2006).

It is in the ways of the folk where the LDS faith has been viewed and interpreted as it appears in the daily thoughts, actions, and works of LDS members. This presentation is academic, with writings by scholars discussing their topics with an educated and critical eye. The chapters look at stories, folkways, and objects, analyzing them from both the perspective of the folk and from doctrinal Mormonism as well as from a sympathetic academic viewpoint—that is, from the perspective of one who lives among the Mormons rather than as outsiders presuming they can interpret Mormon lore. As Eliason and Mould state in the introduction, “Understanding why Mormon folklorists might choose to study Mormon folklore, then, is certainly bound up in many of the same reasons scholars of other religious faiths and other subcultures have chosen to study their own groups” (10). The beauty of this approach is that LDS folklorists are “asked to wear two hats: that of a practitioner and that of a scholar,” even as they acknowledge that the “pitfalls and benefits of such dual identity have been well studied” (16).

I am not sure whether stories regarding the legendary Three Nephites still circulate, but I am certainly happy to see the editors put the kibosh on stories of green Jell-O and funeral potatoes (although narratives abound); not one of the essays presented even mentions these two foods. I appreciate this description and their disclaimer: “Through it all, the term *folklore* continues to confound, both in popular culture and among LDS members, as a recent conversation attests. Upon hearing a description of this book project, a member . . . chuckled, saying she looked forward to reading about green Jell-O, funeral potatoes, and ‘all those wild stories about those wacky Mormons.’ . . . To be sure, missionary pranks and legends about celebrities who may or may not be members of the LDS Church are part of Mormon folklore. Yet so are deeply spiritual traditions of personal revelation, family home evenings, priesthood blessings, and testimonies” (6).

The essays are wonderful; the topics we who study LDS lore hold dear are presented and interpreted in an respectful and academic approach—words that not only scholars in LDS lore will appreciate, but in a fashion that the everyday reader, curious about Mormon culture, will understand. These essays include the oft-reported tales of Porter Rockwell (322), BYU coed jokes (385), a look into Mormon architecture (48, 81, 83), Mormon women’s narratives (215), and the ever-popular missionary lore (405).

William A. Wilson is, to many LDS historians and academicians the “go-to” author of LDS folkways, particularly his writings on Mormon missionaries. His reprinted essay, “On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries” (415) is thought-provoking, inspirational, entertaining, and timeless. A classic is the senior companion who explained to his greenie: “Now, Elder, out here we pray an awful lot. If we had to repeat these prayers all the time we’d spend most of our time on our knees and never have time to do the

Lord's work. Instead, we have all the prayers numbered.' With that the two slid to their knees and the senior volunteered to say the prayer. 'Number 73,' he prayed, and jumped into bed, leaving the new missionary in a crumpled mass on the floor" (421). Wilson explains such pranks: "Most missionaries participate in these pranks, then, as a means of establishing and maintaining a sense of community among their members. Other folklore practices also contribute to this sense of community" (423). These words solidify and validate Mormon folklore. Mormons, just like any other folk group, seek to establish a sense of community, and it is through their lore this is accomplished.

While I understand that compiling material and going through the editing process is exhausting, this book is not necessarily current. It is, rather, a snapshot in time. It is certainly not an exhaustive approach to LDS lore. Numerous folklorists (LDS and non-LDS) who have written about LDS lore are not represented in this compilation. A plethora of writings about Mormon folklore are not in this compilation, particularly more contemporary writings. Most of these articles are reprints, and it would have been helpful to read when these were initially written and/or presented and to whom they were originally designed to reach. I know the article by Kristi Young, which includes my daughter's creative dating experience, was written more than ten years ago (114). Yet I stand with Eliason and Mould who state: "This book attempts to gather together a representative survey of the best of those studies for a critical analysis of Mormon folklore by scholars well trained and well versed in the challenges of objective analysis" (19). It succeeds quite well in achieving that goal. The notes (483) and bibliography (539) are in themselves a great resource for further discussion.

If I were to teach a college course on LDS folklore, this would be the textbook from which I would direct discussions and research. While not necessarily a book to pick up and read for its entertainment value, anyone interested in Utah history, Mormon studies, or curious about Mormons and their ways would certainly enjoy it. As the late Wallace Stegner wrote, in his essay about J. Golden Kimball, included in this publication, "'Suppose,' he said once, 'I do everything the Lord asks of me and by and by He says to me, 'Good boy, Golden, go on up there.' And I am exalted to the highest pinnacle and you people lag behind and fail to do your duty. What fun can I have up there all alone playing the Jew's harp and talking to myself and knowing you fellows are stuck in the mud somewhere?' There has never been a better statement or a better exemplification of the group spirit of Mormonism" (401).

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pieces, and considers them her friends and mentors.

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LaMar C. Berrett and Blair G. Van Dyke. *Holy Lands: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Near East*. American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2005. xii, 447 pp. Photographs, map, notes, appendices (lists of missions and presidents, burial sites, missionaries, special representatives, dedications; dedicatory prayer of Orson Hyde Garden in Jerusalem; agreement not to proselytize in Israel), index. Hardbound: \$29.95; ISBN 1-59156-660-6.

*Reviewed by Kent P. Jackson*

LaMar C. Berrett, a professor in the Church History and Doctrine Department at Brigham Young University from 1963 to 1991, was a high-energy researcher with a passion for exploration. Those who knew him know that he was more of a finder and collector than a synthesizer; but in finding and collecting, he made lasting contributions to the discipline of Mormon history.

Early in his career, Berrett developed an interest in traveling to historic sites, and he became firmly converted to the idea of connecting events to locations. He began organizing tours, some to Mormon history sites and some to other parts of the world. As this interest developed, he spent many summers directing LDS-oriented tours to various locations around the world. Of special interest to him were the lands with biblical connections—the Middle East and the Holy Land. Even though his teaching and academic work were primarily in the field of Mormon history, the biblical world soon became an important focus of his attention. In 1973 he published *Discovering the World of the Bible* (Brigham Young University Press), a guidebook to sites of scriptural interest in the Middle East and Greece. It sold well and for a long time was used in BYU Travel Study tours.

A much more significant work is represented in the six excellent guide books Berrett wrote, along with various co-authors, from 1999 to 2007. The *Sacred Places* series, published by Deseret Book, was the fruit of decades of research by Berrett and his colleagues to identify historic sites connected with Mormon history in the East, the Midwest, and along the pioneer trail to Utah. As department chair in the early 1970s, he facilitated the research by sending colleagues to those locations on academic research leaves to scour archives and county courthouses in search of every available Mormon source that would pin an event to a location. I have used those guidebooks in my own travels on several occasions.

Berrett's skill in finding and identifying, as well as his interest in sacred his-

tory in the Middle East, are brought together in *Holy Lands: A History of the Latter-day Saints in the Near East*. By the late 1960s, he had already begun collecting information for the book, and he continued to collect sources for many years after that. As years passed, he came to the conclusion that his other interests would never let him finish the project, so he invited Blair G. Van Dyke to join him as co-author. Van Dyke, an instructor in the Church Educational System, had lived in Jerusalem and had done academic research in Gaza for his doctoral dissertation. And crucially, he had sufficient energy to pick up the project and make it a success. Berrett did the earliest research; but when Van Dyke became involved in 1997, he extended the project's scope, expanded the research, and did most of the writing. It was a constructive partnership that saw the book appear in print before Berrett passed away in August 2007.

*Holy Lands* presents the history of the Latter-day Saint experience in the countries that are now Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel/Palestine. The authors never explain their geographical selection, but a map on the endpapers of the front and back covers shows the Ottoman Empire in 1900 as the limit. The book is essentially a history of the LDS Turkish Mission (1887–1909) and its various successor missions. It does not include discussion of the RLDS congregation in Palestine early in the twentieth century. The time frame extends from 1841, when Orson Hyde dedicated the Holy Land, through 1884, when the first Mormon missionary arrived in Constantinople, to the 1980s. The coverage within that time frame is uneven, but it reflects the unevenness of the Latter-day Saint presence during that time. For example, in the two decades 1889–1909, there was an active LDS presence in the area but little during the 1910s. The book's focus is primarily on the missionaries who served rather than on individual Church members or larger developments. This emphasis was probably inevitable, given the availability of sources and the fact that so many of the converts emigrated to the United States not long after their conversions. It is mainly a story of making converts and sending them to Zion, not of building the Church in the Middle East.

The sources used in the book consist primarily of mission records, missionary diaries, and Church periodicals. The periodicals, particularly the *Millennial Star* and the *Deseret Weekly* in the nineteenth century, play a particularly important role in this research because they chronicle the arrivals and departures of missionaries and recount other mission news. Often, correspondence from the missionaries would be printed in these periodicals. The Turkish Mission Record, a scrapbook of information from the branches of the mission, was another essential source. Of the diaries, the most important is that of Joseph Wilford Booth, who served a mission in Turkey and Syria (1898–1902), then served as mission president (1903–9, 1921–28). On his arrival in Constantinople, Booth wrote: "At 2 p.m. I retired to my room and although alone so far as human beings were concerned I held divine service and sang and



prayed and partook of the sacrament in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. I felt to Glorify the name of the Lord who had been so merciful unto me and I felt that he had accepted of my fasting and prayers and will continue his blessing toward me. About 3:30 o'clock I broke my long fast, eating a plain dinner" (143).

Interviews with more recent missionaries, such as Dilworth B. Parkinson (1970–72), provide another important source of information.

Probably three-fourths of the book deals with missionary efforts among Armenians, mostly in southeastern Anatolia and Syria. This focus reflects the reality of the mission. The vast majority of LDS activity was among Armenians, who accounted by far for the majority of converts. Turkish and Arab Muslims were rarely interested in the LDS message and were never a serious focus of Mormon conversion efforts. The Armenians, in contrast, were Christians. A large portion of those whom the missionaries taught and converted had already left the established Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church and had become Protestants. Their earlier abandonment of the ancestral and national faith had shown many of them to be independent-minded enough to accept the Mormon message when they heard it. In the early twentieth century, the plight of Armenian Latter-day Saints reflected that of Ottoman Armenians in general. The massacres and forced migrations decimated the Church in Turkey. Those who could afford to emigrate did so, but most had perished by the end of World War I.

Missionaries also made efforts among European Christians. One concentration to which the Church gave considerable interest was a group of German immigrants called Templers. Coming primarily from southwest Germany, this group of reformers established colonies in Palestine in an effort to restore the land in anticipation of Jesus's return. Their good works and their presence in the Holy Land were to constitute a spiritual temple before the Second Coming. In 1886 Apostle Francis M. Lyman visited the Templer colony near Haifa and determined that it might be fertile ground for preaching Mormonism. The first missionary was sent there later that year, and a sporadic Mormon presence remained until the 1930s. From the Haifa colony, which consisted of about four hundred people by the turn of the twentieth century, Mormonism gleaned about twenty German converts.

Barrett and Van Dyke tell the stories of five missionaries who died in the Middle East during their service. All five are buried in local cemeteries—Edgar Simmons in Gaziantep, Turkey; Emil Huber and Joseph Booth in Aleppo, Syria; and Adolf Haag and John Clark in Haifa, Israel. Concerning Clark's death, they write:

Elder Clark's daily contact with the people had tragic, unforeseen consequences. Later in 1895, a smallpox epidemic raged through Haifa. Unaware that the city was in the early stages of infestation by disease, Elder

Clark continued his labors among the people, and by the end of January he showed his first symptoms of the dreaded disease. . . . At 1:00 a.m. on February 8, 1895, the twenty-three-year-old missionary passed away. . . .

Elder John Clark was buried in the German Templer Cemetery in Haifa within twenty feet of Elder Adolf Haag's grave, and their marble pillar monuments are identical. (109–10)

The history of the Church in the Middle East is one of starts and stops. The Turkish Mission opened in 1887 and closed in 1896, opened again (1897–1909), reopened as the Armenian Mission (1921–28), and again, as the Palestine-Syrian Mission (1933–39). The Near East Mission was open for a single year, 1950. The area was then placed under the Swiss Mission (1960–75) then became part of the International Mission, which is approximately when Berrett and Van Dyke close their account. During most, but not all, of the years when the mission under these various names was open, the Church had missionaries in the Middle East. But to some degree, those years also represent the years in which the Church had functioning ecclesiastical units there. There were, of course, exceptions; and often the reopening of the mission was in response to pleas from local people who had found their way into Mormonism independently of missionaries or were the remnants of earlier convert congregations. But Mormonism was never a significant presence.

*Holy Lands* provides a great deal of data and enough commentary to move the story along successfully. To some extent, it might be described as an encyclopedia of Mormon history in the Middle East in chronological order. Its scope is so broad that it does not dig deeply into very many areas, but it does what Berrett and Van Dyke intended it to do—survey the landscape. Enough context is provided to make the story understandable and enjoyable. I view this book as the potential starting point for further study in a variety of areas.

The latter part of *Holy Lands* was the least satisfying to me. Virtually the only narrative that continues beyond 1975 is the final chapter, which recounts the creation of the Brigham Young University Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies in the 1980s. The authors' narration of the building of the Jerusalem Center may be the best one in print, and I have used it in my own telling of the story. They rightly view its construction as a major accomplishment, but the chapter's position at the end of the book suggests that the authors viewed it as the culmination of all that precedes it in the narrative. Instead, that part of the story reads more like an excursus disconnected from the rest of the book. And much more of the story of the Church in the Middle East could have been told to bring it up to the time of the book's publication.

Since the end of the book's main narrative in 1975, the history of Mormonism in the Middle East has continued. The authors' penultimate chapter shows how by the 1960s, much of the involvement of Latter-day Saints in the Middle East came from Mormon visitors from the West or, especially, from ex-

patriates—foreigners whose employment brought them to live in the Middle East temporarily. In some areas, the Church became, and continues to be, an expatriate community. Israel, for example, now has three branches, virtually all of whose members are expatriates. The Jerusalem Branch consists mainly of BYU students and faculty families, along with families associated with the U.S. Consulate and a few foreign domestic workers. The Tel Aviv Branch is made up primarily of Filipino workers and U.S. Embassy families. Of Turkey's branches, the Adana Branch consists mainly of U.S. military families, and the Istanbul Branch includes Africans, Filipinos, and Americans, but also some Turks. Cairo has had an expatriate branch for many years. Wards and branches in the Gulf States, never part of the Turkish Mission, are similarly made up of expatriate professionals and workers.

But elsewhere, Church units better reflect the native populations. Jordan, which had very little LDS presence in the time covered by the book, now has three LDS branches. One branch in Amman is for expatriates, the other is made up of local Arabs, as is another branch in Irbid. The focus of the last three decades covered in *Holy Lands* is on Lebanon. Beginning in 1964, missionaries were sent there from the Swiss Mission. Most who were converted were Lebanese Armenians. Today, the Beirut Branch includes Lebanese Arabs and Armenians, and sometimes expatriates. In Palestine, a branch in Bethlehem consists entirely of Palestinian Arab Latter-day Saints. Bethlehem and the three branches in Israel make up the Jerusalem District. Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt comprise a district headquartered in Beirut. In each of those areas, the Church has established rules that pertain to talking about Mormonism with local or foreign Christians, but proselytizing among Muslims is forbidden.

*Holy Lands* makes a significant contribution to telling the story of Mormonism's first century in the Middle East. It is a story that needed to be told, and it is a story that continues.

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Kenneth Lougee. *Pie in the Sky: How Joe Hill's Lawyers Lost His Case, Got Him Shot, and Were Disbarred*. Bloomington, Ind.: iUniverse, Inc. 2011. 183 pp. Photographs, index. Paperback: \$14.95; ISBN: 978-1-4620-2992-1.

*Reviewed by John Dinger*

On January 10, 1914, John Morrison, a former policeman, and his son were shot and killed while they worked at their grocery store in Salt Lake City. Morrison's son was able to fire his .38 caliber revolver and likely hit one of the intruders before succumbing to his wounds. That same night, Joe Hill, a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) a pro-labor organization, showed up at the home of a Salt Lake doctor, with a bullet wound through his chest. Hill was later arrested and put on trial for the murders where he was found guilty and sentenced to death. He was executed by firing squad less than two years later on November 19, 1915. While murders were not a rare occurrence in the early twentieth century, this case has led to considerable discussion by lawyers, historians, and law students in the following century.

Many books have been written on Joe Hill and his famous murder case including Gibbs Smith's *Joe Hill—The Man and Myth* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs M. Smith, 1969), Dr. Philip Foner's *The Case of Joe Hill* (Canada, International Publishers Inc., 1965), William Adler's *The Man Who Never Died: The Life, Times, and Legacy of Joe Hill* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), and even a historical novel by Wallace Stegner called *The Preacher and the Slave* (New York, Doubleday & Co., 1950). So do we need Kenneth Lougee's *Pie in the Sky*? The answer is yes because Lougee comes to the long-discussed case with a different perspective. While Lougee's book deals with Joe Hill, its focus is on the lawyers who represented him through his trial and appeals: Ernest D. MacDougall, Frank B. Scott, and Judge Orin Hilton. The term "Pie in the Sky" usually refers to a hope for a special reward. In reading this book you will see that the attorneys never received—and never deserved—any reward for their work.

Lougee's volume is a very quick and interesting read at only 183 pages. He starts his volume by setting the stage and introducing us to the key players in the Joe Hill trial. He gives background to the crime on January 10, the IWW (of which Joe Hill was a member), and most interestingly, the national and regional courts and their reaction to pro-labor demonstrators. Lougee concludes that Salt Lake was a "hard place to try a case," but not because of any Mormon influence (36). In fact, Lougee concludes that "with the exception of Angus Cannon, no Mormon leader interfered in the major labor difficulties" (49). The reason it was a difficult place to try a case is because it was a very conservative and pro-business state. It was a state that believed that "preserving American business interests" was very important and elected senators that shared these same views (45).

Another reason that pro-labor or pro-socialist arguments would not work was because of the make-up of the Utah people. While many members of Utah's working class were foreign born, socialist arguments on nativism did not resonate with the Utah population. The reason for this, according to Lougee, was in part because the Mormon Church had established foreign mis-

sions for more than seventy-five years and many Church leaders were themselves foreign born, including James E. Talmage, B. H. Roberts, and John A. Widsoe (45). One of the great strengths of Lougee's book is his argument countering the assertion that Hill was simply railroaded by a Mormon jury. According to Lougee, it just was not the case.

As Lougee introduces Hill's two trial attorneys, he effectively shows that they did not understand the make-up of Salt Lake City and the people's attitudes toward the pro-labor movement. MacDougall, age thirty-five, was a fairly new attorney from Wyoming who had signed the Utah roll of attorneys only six days before the Hill trial. Not much is known about MacDougall. He was likely born in Ontario, Canada, in 1879, and was living in Detroit by 1900. In Detroit he claimed to be an attorney, but there are no records that he ever attended a law school. He taught school in Colorado and Kansas, was admitted to the Wyoming bar in 1913, and before becoming an attorney, listed his profession as a "strike breaker" (57-58).

Scott was more experienced and had been practicing law since at least 1905; however he was advertised as a patent attorney. Scott was also born in Canada, in Nova Scotia where his first job was with the Halifax City Attorney's Office. He was constantly being sued by business partners for fraud and even Joe Hill called him a "shyster" (60).

Both attorneys took the case pro bono, acting jointly as defense attorneys, which was normal for a high-profile murder. However, because they were not being paid, they didn't have a lot of money to spend on the defense. Lougee concludes that they "needed an investigator" to help interview witnesses and hunt down evidence that could help establish an alibi. However, neither attorney did this (61).

In discussing the jury selection process, Lougee brings forth some very interesting details. The jury foreman was Joseph Smith Kimball, a two-term territorial legislator and member of the Utah Constitutional Convention, who was very well connected. He was the son of Heber C. Kimball and Prescinda Huntington Buell Kimball. His wife was the daughter of Orson Pratt. His aunt, Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs Smith Young, was general president of the Relief Society; his half-brother J. Golden Kimball was a member of the third-ranked First Council of Seventy, his nephew Orson F. Whitney was an apostle, and his sister was married to Church President Joseph F. Smith (81). Lougee's book is full of interesting details like this, adding great interest to the story. However, in the telling he does occasionally get some details wrong. In discussing Joseph Kimball he states that Joseph Smith "did not practice polygamy until the Latter Day Saints removed to Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1843" (80). The Saints moved to Nauvoo (originally Commerce) in 1839, not 1843. Also, not counting two of the most controversial plural wives of Joseph Smith (Fanny Alger and Lucinda Pendleton Morgan Harris), Joseph Smith had apparently

married seventeen women prior to 1843.<sup>1</sup>

Lougee's book has some other problems as well. For example, he discusses the attorneys' inability to impeach any of the prosecution witnesses but fails to cite the transcript or any other source where he found this information. This lack of citation occurs in many places throughout the book. There is a fascinating discussion of Frank J. Cannon and his influence in Utah in the early 1900s. The information Lougee presented was so interesting I wanted to learn more by following up his sources, but he cites only one page in Leonard Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*, which did not provide all the information contained in his book. At one point he references an argument forwarded by Kathleen Flake in *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), but cites the book generally, with no specific page numbers.

Another problem is that the book sometimes reads like a speech. This should not be a surprise to the reader as Lougee clearly states in the acknowledgements that this book started as a presentation given to the Labor and Employment division of the Utah State Bar Association. Because of this, he often inserts himself into the story. In discussion portions of the case, he makes comments like, "what I did . . ." and "what I had to learn . . ." While this mode of address seems appropriate in a speech, it is somewhat distracting in print.

Ultimately, after an interesting discussion of the original trial and regardless of Joseph Kimball's connections, Lougee concludes: "It is impossible to exaggerate how badly this case was handled at trial, but it was badly handled within the rules of trial procedure. The blame for this result rests not upon the 'copper bosses,' the Mormon Church, the judicial system, or any other conspiracy. It cannot be blamed on the prosecutor or the judge. In sum, MacDougall and Scott sealed Joe Hill's fate, and they did it to their client and themselves" (98).

Lougee then turns to Judge Orin Hilton, who handled Hill's appeal before the Utah Supreme Court. Hilton, unlike the trial attorneys, was a very experienced trial lawyer. Born in Massachusetts, he was educated at Bates College and appointed a circuit judge in Michigan—the source of his title as "Judge" Hilton from then on. He moved to Colorado in 1890 and started practicing in

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<sup>1</sup>George D. Smith, "Nauvoo Roots of Mormon Polygamy, 1841–46: A Preliminary Demographic Report," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 13–14, identifies them as Louisa Beaman, Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs, Presendia Lathrop Huntington Buell in 1841; in 1842 Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Patty Bartlett Sessions, Nancy Marinda Johnson Hyde, Delcena Johnson Sherman, Eliza Roxcy Snow, Sarah Ann Whitney, Martha McBride Knight, Sarah Bapson, Agnes Coolbirth Smith, Elizabeth Davis Brakenbury Durfee, Sally A. Fuller, Desdemona W. Fuller, Sarah M. Kingsley, and Elvira Annie Cowles.

the West. He defended many high-profile labor cases, including the acquittal of Vincent St. John of a double homicide. Lougee describes him as “the most important labor lawyer of the era” and a “brilliant trial lawyer” (112). However, as Lougee decisively establishes, he was not an appellate attorney. Lougee states that there is no record of Hilton arguing an appeal either before the Hill case or after his appearance in the Hill case before the Utah Supreme Court. This situation left Hill saddled with a very experienced inexperienced attorney. After Hilton lost both the appeal and an argument before the commutation board, Hilton attacked the Church—an obvious attempt to argue his case before the court of public opinion. According to Hilton, “The genesis of . . . this tragedy out of Salt Lake City, took its rise in the bureaucratic power of the Mormon Church.” He went on to call the Church the “vilest thing in our national life today, that hideous, slimy monster” (134–35). This intemperate language, more than anything else, led to his disbarment in Utah in 1916. Furthermore, it failed to sway the Utah Supreme Court, which in 1916 had no Mormon members.

After discussion of the trial and appeal, Lougee then discusses some of the conspiracies that have survived time and are still discussed and believed today. The major one is that the Mormon Church killed Joe Hill. Lougee discusses the paranoia that afflicted the country where Utah was concerned but also showed that the only Mormons involved were a few members of the jury, and Governor William Spry who would not commute the sentence. Ultimately, Lougee persuasively argues against the Church conspiracy theory in the entirety of his book.

While this book is not perfect (and no book is), it is a very interesting look into labor, the legal system, and, to a degree, the Mormon Church in the early twentieth century. Anyone interested in these topics should do themselves a favor and read this book.

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