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MORMON HISTORY ASSOCIATION
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To THE HISTORY DIVISION, HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT, THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, for the series of thirty-two Task Papers in LDS History which have so far appeared since 1975. Although limited in circulation and mimeographed in form, they have provided clues and answers for historians exploring many facets of Mormonism.

To THE ENSIGN, the monthly magazine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, for the excellent series of articles, features, and illustrations which have appeared since September 1978 as resource materials for the study of Church history. Professionally prepared examples of “faithful history,” they have opened new vistas of the Mormon past to a lay readership.
The study of the religion of the earliest Latter-day Saints is only now being freed, I think, from the distortions that Alice Felt Tyler and Whitney R. Cross imposed on it nearly forty years ago. Professor Tyler, perhaps remembering the lectures of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., on new American religious movements, set Mormons alongside Shakers, Adventists, and Spiritualists, and stressed the peculiarly American dimensions of all four movements. Professor Cross, following geographical clues which, with Mario S. De Pillis, I believe are the wrong ones, spotted Wesleyan Methodists also in the weedpatch of "ultraist" movements which he thought grew on the ash heaps of burnt-out puritanism in central New York. David Brion Davis and others, however, have argued that Joseph Smith's religion stemmed from the persistence rather than the decay of puritanism. With Klaus Hansen, these more recent students of the subject perceived millennialism to have been a dominant strain in the New England heritage, and they attributed to the sense of chosenness and destiny that it nurtured the Protestant and Anglo-Saxon chauvinism that they

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thought characteristic of both Mormonism and mid-nineteenth-century nationalism.2

Linking Mormon history thus to normative rather than off-beat Protestantism was a step forward, certainly. But I have a quite different view of what was normative in the regions where the movement took root — Vermont, the New York lake country, the Western Reserve of Ohio, southeastern Pennsylvania, and the West Midlands of England. In all these places the faith of the Latter-day Saints won converts who cared very little for Yankee puritanism, whether in the style of John Cotton, Jonathan Edwards, or Samuel Hopkins. Rather, in both America and England the biblical culture of a remarkably diverse free-church Protestantism nourished them.3

The religious dialogues which shaped Joseph Smith's youthful perceptions and dominated the imaginations of those first converted to his beliefs took place among what were to become the most numerous American denominations — Methodists, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, and Presbyterians. All of these, and not simply the fringe sects, were deeply engaged in revivals aimed at securing the conversion of the unawakened who were the majority in every locality. All participated in the spreading debates over free will, universal redemption, original sin, moral perfection, the nature and nearness of the millennium, and the recovery in the last days of primitive Christianity through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In those debates, each group appealed directly to the authority of the Bible. Usually they did so in such a manner as not to deny the long tradition of scriptural interpretation each had inherited. But continuous argument nurtured the conviction among both preachers and hearers that the plain teachings of the New Testament offered sufficient guidance for all aspects of Christian faith and doctrine. Moreover, all sects were caught in the tendency of religious debate to focus the attention of each one on what seemed unique to itself, rather than what it shared with others.

These governing preoccupations and tendencies toward biblicism and sectarianism characterized the first Latter-day Saints as well, though the appearance of an additional set of scriptures, whose publication is being celebrated this year, kept both contemporaries and modern students from realizing that was the case.


3Alexander Campbell, An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; with an Examination of the Internal and External Evidences (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1832), pp. 6-7, suggests that the Disciples of Christ leader sensed this possibility as early as February 1831; for the Book of Mormon, he wrote, recorded the prophet Nephi as teaching "everything which is now preached in the state of New York." The broad inclusiveness of state-church Lutheranism in Scandinavia obscured what was beneath its umbrella a similar rootage for Mormon faith in popular piety there; see William Mulder, Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), pp. 34-53, and passim; Einar Molland, Church Life in Norway, 1800-1950, trans. Harris Kaasa (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1957), pp. 2-3, 10-19, 35-41, 48-52. On the English situation, the clearest summary is Philip A. M. Taylor, Expectations Westward; the Mormons and the Emigration of Their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), pp. 35-38.
While still residing in Vermont, the parents and kinsfolk of Joseph Smith were deeply affected by the appeals various sects made on behalf of their special interpretations of scripture. Donna Hill has carefully summarized the available information in her recent biography. The consistent or inconsistent Calvinism of the Congregationalist churches and their established membership in the larger villages held little interest for socially marginal families like the Smiths. Whenever such families did turn to religion, they were more likely to respond to Methodist affirmations of free grace, free will, and Christian perfection; to the Universalist insistence that a God of justice and love must save all human beings from eternal punishment; or to the Baptist declaration that none would experience the remission of sins unless faith and repentance were joined in baptism by immersion. All these shared the speculations about the ancient and the future history of Indians and Jews which were springing up in Vermont, as throughout the Christian world, during these years.

Joseph Smith, Sr., during a period of deep religious concern, rejected the suggestion of his wife, Lucy, that he become a Methodist, awaiting, he said, some resolution of the disagreements over the meanings of scripture advanced to sustain contradictory doctrines. After grueling misfortune removed the family to the Lake Canandaigua country, both the parents and the teen-aged children experienced in Methodist and Presbyterian revival meetings the same tensions. The chief question then was whether and how fully to follow the Presbyterians, who were the social and religious elite of the community, in the face of Methodist moral and spiritual fervor. Whatever the attractions of each sect, both seemed to leave important issues of conscience and scripture unresolved.

Crucial among these issues was the extent and nature of the authority of the Bible. This was especially important in America, where both civil and ecclesiastical government had broken with the forms of the past and declared allegiance to constitutions of the people's composition. Equally crucial to individuals, however, was the validity and assurance of their hope of salvation, in this life and in the world to come. I believe the latter concern chiefly explains the willingness of so many to commit themselves to religious movements which called for a radical restructuring of church and society on models they thought were drawn from the one New Testament church of primitive Christianity.

8Gordon Irving, "The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s," *Brigham Young University Studies* 13 (Summer 1973): pp. 473-78, an article I read only after the first draft of this essay was completed, anticipated this point with close reference to early Mormon periodicals inaccessible to me. Cf. Mario S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Spring 1966):68-88 [reprinted without documentation in
The two most notable of such movements were the Disciples of Christ, whose frame of government affirmed the independence of congregations and pastors but bound both to Alexander Campbell’s understanding of scripture, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose government subjected its followers to awesome discipline and understood even groups of congregations to comprise only a stake for the tabernacle of God. The two movements drew together in differing patterns the central religious ideas that permeated the preaching of Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, and of the gadflies to all of them, the Universalists.

One does not need, therefore, to look beyond the established revivalistic sects to discover why the first Mormon elders won an immediate hearing for their sacred book. Its firm call for personal righteousness, for obedience to the moral demands of the Old Covenant through faith in the New, was by 1830 a dominant motif in all denominations. The experience of the remission of sins and an assurance of salvation, sustained by communal ritual as well as by an inward “witness of the Spirit,” as the Methodists called it, were coveted goals in all evangelical witness. And its doctrine of the promise of the Holy Spirit to all believers had long been central to the preaching of John Wesley and his successors. Moreover, Mormons and Disciples added to such widely-shared beliefs strong convictions about the destiny of Christians and Jews in the last days. In the antithetical moods of either apocalyptic or millennial expectation, these convictions seem to have swept through both English and American revivalistic culture in, astonishingly, the same five years, from 1825 to 1830. Mormon converts, therefore, like the Millerites a few years later, found in the eschatology they embraced answers to questions which not only they but many other Protestants had begun insistently to ask about the Second Coming.
This was as true in Preston and its surrounding towns in the English West Midlands as in central New York. Heber C. Kimball's "Journal...of His Mission to Great Britain" reveals the flowering of biblical study and speculation which had in similar fashion prepared the soil for the early Mormon witness there. He found at Preston and the surrounding towns Baptist, Methodist, and Independent (presumably "Congregationalist") ministers and an Anglican pastor or two who had combined their long-standing emphasis on a life-transforming experience of the Holy Spirit with a more recent interest in the miraculous gifts of the Spirit which British millenarians thought would accompany the end of the age. The most forbidding barrier to these ministers was the demand that they accept the Baptist belief, now fortified by the Book of Mormon, that the remission of sins required submission to the rite of immersion. Several clergymen who were not able to cross that threshold nevertheless testified to their congregations that the teachings of the Saints "were the same principles as taught by the apostles in ancient days" and urged their people to receive them.  

For Joseph Smith and his early followers, then, the Book of Mormon not only resolved doubts about the general authority of scripture but gave clear direction on issues which, in sectarian argument, had been decreed crucial to faith and salvation. These included baptism by immersion; the promise that all modern believers and not simply those of the apostolic age may be "filled with the Holy Ghost" and made pure in heart; universal redemption — that is, salvation by a free response to free grace, in opposition to the Calvinist belief in decrees of predestination; and the necessity of righteousness, of obedience and good works, as both the moral responsibility of human beings and the fruit of the experience of remission of sins.

The book also affirmed the historical veracity of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures by accounts of the Jewish ancestors of the American Indians which plausibly supplemented biblical history. It recapitulated long sections of the

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15 The account in 3 Nephi 19:9, 13, 21, 23, 28-29 parallels, though with different chronology, the New Testament, John 17 and Acts 2. Cf. 2 Nephi 31:8, 12-14, 17; Mosiah 18:10, 12-13; 3 Nephi 11:35-36 and 12:2; Jacob 3:1-3; and Alma 31:36.


prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel, the four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles.\textsuperscript{18} It defined the membership and described in detail the priesthood and the hierarchy of offices of the true church of Jesus Christ, to be reconstituted in the last days.\textsuperscript{19} And it renewed the biblical image of a God who in apocalyptic judgment would reward the righteousness of the saints and destroy their opposers at the Second Coming of Christ. These teachings about the Apocalypse identified as separate entities the two Jerusalems of prophecy, the old and the new, one to which Jews and the other to which believing gentiles should gather. Each would enthrone the returning Jesus as Messiah and King, after which he would launch his millennial reign on earth.\textsuperscript{20} Finally, the volume both exhibited and promised the raising up in the latter days of a prophet who would infallibly interpret both old and new scriptures, give divine direction to the restored church, and confer the baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon the saints.\textsuperscript{21}

Several scholars have noted that many doctrines peculiar to the Latter-day Saints, particularly in the years since their settlement in Utah, rest not upon the Book of Mormon but upon the revelations to Joseph Smith which took place after the publication of that volume. Accounts by believers, apostates, and outsiders during the first decade or so of the church's witness in America and England convince me that the movement would never have gotten off the ground if these unique teachings had constituted its major appeal. The persuasive power of both the new scriptures and of the missionaries who proclaimed and expounded them lay in their confident testimony to beliefs that were central to the biblical culture of the evangelical Protestant sects in both Jacksonian America and early Victorian England.\textsuperscript{22} These beliefs seem in the early years, at least, to have also dominated the thought and devotion of the Saints themselves, even when debates with outsiders revolved around their special doctrines of continuing revelation, the gathering of Jews and Saints in the two Jerusalems, and the material nature of all reality, whether human or divine.

Viewed in this light, the Book of Mormon was not, as Parley Pratt pointed out to his English readers, "calculated to displace or do away with the Bible."\textsuperscript{23} The uncertainties about the Bible which had prompted the various sects "to contend with one another from age to age, respecting the meaning of its contents," Pratt wrote, stemmed from two errors: the widespread beliefs that

\begin{enumerate}
\item See generally 1 Nephi, Jacob, and Mosiah and, for long recapitulations of the prophecy of Isaiah, 2 Nephi, chapters 12 through 24.
\item Mosiah 18:17-18 seems out of harmony with Alma 13:2-18.
\item 2 Nephi 3:5-24, and 26:6-35.
\item Parley P. Pratt, \textit{A Voice of Warning, and Instruction to All People; or, An Introduction to the Faith and Doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints...}, 2nd ed. (1841; reprinted, Lamoni, Iowa, 1885), p. 68. Cf. O. Pratt, \textit{Several Remarkable Visions}, pp. 28-29.
\end{enumerate}
“direct inspiration by the Holy Ghost was not intended for all ages of the church,” and that, in the absence of such inspiration, the various sects had no choice but “to institute their own opinions, traditions, and commandments.” Concerning the “gathering” of the Jews promised in Jeremiah 16, he noted that “uninspired men were not to send uninspired missionaries to teach Israel several hundred different doctrines and opinions of men, and to tell them they suppose the time has about arrived for them to gather; but the God of heaven is to call men by actual revelation, direct from heaven, and to tell them who Israel is; who the Indians of America are, if they should be of Israel; and also where the 10 tribes are, and all the scattered remnant of that long lost people. He it is who is to give them their errand and mission, and to clothe them with power from on high to execute the great work.” Appealing thus to the Bible, Pratt laid the basis for his later apology for the revelations of Joseph Smith, scorning “the whole train of modern divines” who profess “no revelation, later than the Bible, and no direct inspiration, or supernatural gift of the Spirit.”

The first impact of the Book of Mormon upon readers thus seems in many cases, as in those of Pratt and Newel Knight, to have been to confirm or authenticate their belief in the old scriptures.

And why not? The idea of making the Bible alone the foundation of Christian faith had become an obsession on the strength of a larger affirmation, stemming from the Protestant Reformation but reaching the popular level only in the previous century, that scripture contained all truth necessary to salvation and constituted, therefore, “a sufficient rule of faith and practice.” In America such a declaration had special force, given the newness of social, political, and ecclesiastical structures, and a culture in which the future loomed larger than the past.

To declare in the nineteenth century that the Bible was the sole ground of religious authority, however, raised profound questions. Fifteen hundred years had passed since the Council of Nicaea had defined the canon, choosing its contents from among a wider cluster of writings, most of which were even then of very ancient origin. The world of Jews and Egyptians, of Jerubbaal and Babylon, of chariots and evening sacrifices was far removed indeed from frontiersmen and Indians, parliaments and political parties, canals and camp meetings. Many a village skeptic found it difficult to accept a book about such a world as the sole foundation of faith. Some of these, while less sophisticated than Thomas Jefferson, opted for only the ethical authority of the teachings of Jesus — partly, I think, because they seemed less distant in both time and cultural space. Meanwhile, deacons, elders, and some evangelical pastors, unable thus to dismember the scripture, struggled with grave temptations to doubt the truth and relevance of large portions of the book upon which they as

well as the Christians around them must stake all of life. 27 Such a Bible needed all the help it could get.

Even the rumors which preceded the publication of the Book of Mormon anticipated that it would affirm the truth of biblical history. "It is written on a kind of gold leaf," a farmer from Covert, New York, had heard; "it is the same that ours is only... . It speaks of the Millenniam day and tells when it is going to take place and it tells that the man that is to find this Bible his name is Joseph and his father's name is Joseph." 28 When such persons read the volume it unfolded, in the cadences and metaphors of the King James Bible as well as in narratives reminiscent of that book's ancient stories, nearly a thousand years of the history of a family of Jews and their vast progeny in America. The details of the histories were radically different, but they fit together wondrously. And the theology, the moral strictures, the story of Jesus, the promise of salvation, and the descriptions of the last days were remarkably similar. In the mouth of two witnesses, the Bible and the Book of Mormon, many found the truth confirmed, just as the prophecy of Nephi had predicted. 29

They also found that the new scriptures leaned heavily toward Methodist and Disciples theology, at the expense of the Calvinist system long dominant in America. This fact reminds us of Joseph Smith's prior experiences in Methodist revivals and of the significant impact of early Mormon witnesses upon Methodists, not only in western New York and Ohio but in England as well. Early leaders with Methodist backgrounds included the Prophet's wife, Emma Hale Smith; Joseph Young, brother of Brigham Young; Hosea Stout; and, during the period of his apostasy in the 1840s, Oliver Cowdery. 30 The conversions and key roles of the brothers Parley and Orson Pratt, who had passed from Baptist to Disciples affiliation, and of Sidney Rigdon, pastor of a radical Disciples community in Kirtland, demonstrate the appeal of the Book of Mormon to the followers of Alexander Campbell as well. Its union of moralism with universal redemption and its insistence on the linkage between the Baptist rite of immersion and remission of sins resembled Campbell's. And its emphasis upon the immediate availability of the baptism of the Holy Spirit promised divine power to make that linkage an ethical and permanent one. 31

In five important ways I wish now to explain, the Book of Mormon served to strengthen the authority of scripture in the minds of all who listened

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28 Lucius Fenn, Covert, N.Y., February 12, 1830, to Birdseye Bronson, in Mulder and Mortensen, Among the Mormons, pp. 28-29.
31 Hill, Smith, pp. 47-50, recounts the prophet's early contacts with Methodists, and notes the Methodist backgrounds of other early leaders on pp. 62, 94, 101, 152.
seriously to the elders who expounded it, whether or not they accepted the new faith.

First in importance, I think, was the volume’s powerful affirmation that the Christian religion was grounded upon both the Old and New Testaments — this in an age when evangelical Protestants and particularly Campbell’s Disciples of Christ were tending to take seriously only the New Testament. Non-Mormon millenarian doctrine linked Daniel and the book of Revelation, thus contributing to the same end. But the witness of the Saints affirmed what recent biblical scholarship is now making plain — the continuity also of the theology, ethics, and spirituality which the Hebrew and Christian scriptures proclaimed. The Book of Mormon accomplishes this by the repeated appearance in passages of the Nephite and Lamanite prophets (who stood in the tradition of Old Testament religion) of concepts and terminology long familiar to nineteenth-century readers in the key salvation promises of the New Testament.32

In Joseph Smith’s text, the prophet Nephi recited the words of ancient Isaiah in a way which left unquestionable the identity of the Messiah; he was Jesus of Nazareth, the suffering servant.33 The third book of Nephi revealed that after his resurrection Jesus had appeared to those in the New World who had been loyal to the Hebrew covenant which their prophets had renewed after they settled in North America. In that appearance, the risen Lord had delivered exactly the same messages of redemption, faith, and a new life of righteousness through the Holy Spirit that the New Testament had attributed to him during his earthly ministry in Palestine. And he had proclaimed a new kingdom, whose government, ethic, and source of authority was at once prophetic and pentecostal, thoroughly Hebraic and, therefore, fully Christian.34

If radical Protestantism in America has tended towards historylessness — a point I gravely question — Joseph Smith’s recovery and reaffirmation of the unity of the religion of the Old and the New Testaments — in separate patterns molded to fit an Old World and a New — ran dramatically in the opposite direction. He and his missionary elders linked prophecy to history, memory to hope, in a narrative of the past whose every incident pointed to the unfolding of an earthly future hallowed by the presence of the Lord.36

The Book of Mormon also reinforced the ecumenical vision of biblical religion, grounded in the conviction of a common humanity which the stories

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345 Nephi, chaps. 11-26, passim.


36See, among many examples, 2 Nephi 6:8-18; and cf. Orson Pratt, Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon: More Revelation is Indispensably Necessary (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1850-51).
of the creation and of Noah declare and in God's promise to Abraham that in
his seed all peoples of the earth should be blessed. In a century when
romantic nationalism, in America as elsewhere, rushed toward racism, the
testimony of the Latter-day Saints and of their sacred book declared that the
American Indians had always been included among God's chosen people, and
that the Jews always would be. In the last days the Jews would be gathered by
God's providence to Old Jerusalem and, after being miraculously rescued from
otherwise certain destruction in the wars of Gog and Magog, would both
acclaim their savior as Messiah and discover that he was in fact Jesus of
Nazareth. Meanwhile, the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, wherever
they might be, would find their way back to God's favor and blessing; and those
gentiles who embraced the Mormon proclamation of universal redemption
would gather with the Saints of Zion to await their equal inheritance of the
glorious promises made to God's chosen.

Insofar as puritan millennialism may have inspired a chauvinistic view of
America's Anglo-Saxon destiny — a point I also gravelly doubt — the image of
the future in the Book of Mormon was a wholly opposite one. Its teachings, and
the early revelations of Joseph Smith as well, sustained the ecumenical vision
which had flowered among eighteenth-century British evangelicals, both in
and outside the established church, and in piетism, puritanism, and the peace
churches on both sides of the Atlantic. That vision had in fact awakened the
modern missionary movement. The Mormon prophet's understanding of a
worldwide recruitment of the faithful, looking always to Zion and gathering
there, took off where John Wesley's "world parish" had left off.

True, the Saints expected only a peculiarly obedient fraction of the gentiles
to heed the call. Their faith was on that account quintessentially countercultural. Neither in its outer orbit of universalism, therefore, nor in its inner
circle of sectarianism, could the Mormon scenario of the future fit the chauvinistic Americanism which recent commentators have assigned to
mid-nineteenth-century millennialism. But no matter. The broad visions of the
Methodist bishops, of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, and of the offspring of that other Zion in Missouri — the German Lutheran one — will not fit the assigned role very well either. Indeed, the Old Testament's picture of the tragedy of ancient Israel makes it difficult for any

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42Elsbree, Missionary Spirit, pp. 109-14; William B. Gravely, Gilbert Haven, Methodist Abolitionist;
biblical ideology to exalt a nation at the expense of justice, mercy, and walking humbly before God. And the Saints had been given, in the account of the destruction of the Nephites which explained the existence of the golden plates, a second tragic story to underline the point. God’s advocacy of the cause of any people requires and depends upon their advocacy of the cause of all. Chauvinism, whether ethnic or national, was not for them an option.

The Mormon scriptures, and early Mormon preaching, also sustained the call to ethical righteousness which seemed to a widening circle of evangelicals the central theme of the Old and New Testaments. The Biblical bond linking holiness to hope for both individual and social salvation inspired revivalist preaching in America from the early 1820s until the Civil War. Certainly Methodists had no corner on that insight. The Unitarian challenge to the Congregationalist establishment had been from the outset a firmly ethical one. So was the challenge to the Old Calvinism which Lyman Beecher mounted by his revivals in Connecticut and which Charles G. Finney began in 1828 in central New York, eventually bringing it, with Beecher’s reluctant consent, to Boston. William Ellery Channing is reported to have told a parishioner, after Finney’s revival in Boston in 1841, that if he were an evangelical he would preach exactly as the evangelist did because the doctrine of sanctification is what the Bible teaches. By that time, Alexander Campbell’s moralism had for two decades reflected his generation’s perception of the New Testament emphasis upon holy living.

The ethical teachings of the Book of Mormon, identical to those in the Bible, and the reiteration of the moral law in an early revelation at Kirtland reinforced this growing evangelical emphasis on righteousness by faith. The buried plates had yielded a lengthy replication of many of the most ethical passages of Isaiah’s prophecy. Ancient Nephites who heeded the word of the prophets looked forward to Christ, the “Son of righteousness” who, when he


44Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, pp. 103-35, 225-26, and passim.


46Charles G. Finney, Memoirs, ms., Oberlin College Library, in the closing pages of chap. 25, identified Channing as the “Dr. C.” described in the published version of Charles G. Finney, Memoirs (New York City: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1876), pp. 356-57. Cf. William Ellery Channing, The Perfect Life, in Twelve Discourses, ed. William H. Channing, (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1873 [the only volume of Channing’s sermons ever published]), pp. 52-54, 74-75, 113-14, 117-19, 244-45, and passim; these sermons date from the 1830s.

47Campbell, Christian System, pp. 32, 54, 60, 64, 80.


49Nephi 15:7-30 and 16:1-13, the latter being a replication of the vision of the Lord in Isaiah 6.

502 Nephi 26:8-9, 31:9-10.
appeared, called them to obey all the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. 51
The golden age of the Nephite-Lamanite theocracy which followed knew
neither poverty or slavery, thievery or murder. 52 By moral standards common
to both the old and new scriptures the Latter-day Saints must live, in purity of
heart; Zion would be glorious because of holiness. 53 Moreover, as in the Old
and New Testaments but with more frequent and explicit use of pentecostal
imagery, the Book of Mormon declared such righteousness to depend upon
the power of God’s active grace, conferred in “the baptism of fire and of the
Holy Ghost.” 54

The evidence that the elders and early apostles made these calls to holiness a central part of their witness is overwhelming. 55 And the earliest informed
critics of the Kirtland community acknowledged it. “I saw nothing indecorous,”
feminine evangelist Nancy Towle wrote of her visit there in September 1831,
“nor had I an apprehension of anything of the kind.” 56 Ezra Booth, a Method-
ist both before and after what he called his months of “delusion” as a Mormon convert, criticized at length Joseph Smith’s materialism, his autocratic rule and his claims to miraculous gifts, and noted what he thought was the failure of some of the prophet’s revelations to fit the subsequent facts. But Booth had no complaint at all of Smith’s doctrine of radical obedience to biblical commandments. 57 A Presbyterian observer from Portage County wryly accredited to the emphasis on holiness the conversions of so many Disciples, Universalists, and Methodists, as well as some Baptists and Presbyterians.
“They have been down through the ice in the mill-pond and their sins are all washed away,” he wrote, “and they are clothed with self-righteousness as with a garment.” 58 What critics did complain about was the economic radicalism implicit in the explicitly biblical “Law of Consecration,” proclaimed on February 9, 1831, and the extent to which the prophet’s “Word of Wisdom,” published in February 1833, outdistanced the evangelicals who had recently adopted total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, by requiring Saints to forego tobacco, coffee, and tea as well. 59

Instructed in such a tradition, Heber C. Kimball presented the Word of Wisdom to several hundred new converts in England on his first Christmas

513 Nephi 12:3 through 14:27.
524 Nephi 16.
53Jacob 3:2-3; Moroni 10:31-33.
57Ezra Booth, Nelson, Portage County [Ohio], September 1831 [and succeeding months], to Ira Eddy [presiding elder, Methodist Episcopal Church], reprinted in E. D. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed (Painesville, Ohio: The Author, 1834), pp. 177-80, 187-90, 201-3, and passim.
58Quoted by Mulder and Mortensen, Among the Mormons, p. 63.
59Hill, Smith, pp. 131, 154; D&C 89:5, 8-9.
there, having taught it during the previous months, as he wrote a bit later, "more by example than precept." The subsequent friendliness of numerous local temperance societies and the willingness of so many English Methodists to embrace Mormon millenarianism would not have been possible in the absence of this rigorous call to righteousness.

A bit later Orson Pratt demanded that the Saints in England exercise "strictness of discipline in plucking off dead branches . . ., laying the axe at the very root of every species of wickedness." Not only elders but members of the Twelve and if necessary the president of the church in Britain must be "dealt with strictly by the law of God," if found to "teach or practice any iniquity," particularly that of adultery. Such strictness, he wrote, "has a powerful tendency to strengthen and confirm the weak and humble, and to enlighten the eyes of the honest inquirer." The outrageous gentile perception of Mormons as polygamous libertines, implanted deeply in popular consciousness later by the debates over the admission of Utah to the Union, grossly belies the prim moralism of the early Saints.

The crisis which the revelation concerning plural marriage brought on for Joseph Smith in Nauvoo stemmed not only from his perception that it contradicted the painfully explicit teachings of the Book of Mormon and earlier revelations on the subject recorded in his Doctrine and Covenants. It also contradicted the recent actions he and the other Mormon leaders had taken, in the name of those precepts and out of respect for the biblical sensibilities of all the Saints, to discipline elders who had taught or practiced the contrary. The biblical sensibilities in the long run prevailed. This was due partly, I suppose, to the sturdy moralism that shines through the last paragraph of the prophet's February 1842 letter to John Wentworth, which in the twentieth century has passed for the creed of the Latter-day Saints. Its second and third articles read: "We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam's transgression. We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind may be saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel."

Turning now to another facet of the question, the Book of Mormon also helped bring to fruition the movement, rooted in puritan, pietist, Quaker, and Wesleyan experience, to restore to prominence the doctrine of the presence of

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63 Jacob 2:23-33, 3:5.
64 D&C 19:25, 63:14-18.
the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people and in the testimony of his witnesses. That the prophecy of Isaiah and Acts were so central in the Book of Mormon encouraged this result. And the surge of interest in the promise of the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days which had recently permeated Protestant culture, serving as a rationale for both revivalism and millennialism, sustained it. 67

In Charles G. Finney's case, as I have recently tried to show more clearly, the promise of the Holy Spirit provided crucial resolution of the inadequacies he saw in the lives of his converts. He had preached the law of radical love in the unfounded hope that if sinners truly repented and believed, they would be able to love God supremely and keep that law. Converts who proved unable to overcome temptation forced him to reconsider the doctrine of sanctification. In the winter and spring of 1839, Finney worked his way through the Bible, pursuing the links between the promise of the New Covenant, made through Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the fulfillment of that "promise of the Father," as Jesus had called it, in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. 68

To be sure, the interpretation of the events of Pentecost and the development of charismatic doctrine among Latter-day Saints proceeded in a different direction. Nevertheless, the testimony of both inside and outside observers indicates that in the early years something akin to modern pentecostal phenomena took place among at least the inner circle of the Saints, despite its confinement in most instances to the ceremony in which elders by the "laying on of hands" formally conferred the gift of the Holy Spirit upon baptized believers. 69

I wish to stress here, however, the impact upon the use of scripture by other Christians of the constant appeal by Mormon apologists to the presence of the Holy Spirit in their community. After 1830, evangelicals in several traditions greatly expanded their use of the language of Pentecost to declare the power of God to be at work in the present world. John Wesley, of course, had carefully distinguished for his followers what he called the "extraordinary" gifts of the Spirit — languages and their interpretation, healing and other miracles — from the "ordinary" one of hallowing, or sanctifying, grace. The latter, he proclaimed, was available to all Christians in all ages. 70 But until the mid-1830s, at the earliest, American and English Methodists active in the promotion of Christian perfection used only occasionally, and with some reluctance, John Fletcher's language calling for a pentecostal baptism of the

Spirit. After Finney's lectures of 1839 appeared, that reluctance seems to have vanished. 71 Charles Simeon, Cambridge pastor and chief inspiration to the evangelicals in the Church of England, had visited John Fletcher in his youth, but seems to have first preached earnestly on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the early 1830s. The widespread use of pentecostal rhetoric did not take place in England, therefore, until the decade of the 1840s. 72 When Charles G. Finney and Phoebe Palmer arrived in the 1850s, however, they found that rhetoric quite acceptable there. 73 In America, meanwhile, Protestant preachers of all sorts had long since fulfilled Ralph Waldo Emerson's hope that they might be bards of the Holy Ghost. 74 In 1857 Henry Clay Fish, Baptist pastor in Newark, won a well-advertised national prize for his essay, "Primitive Piety Revived," 75 calling for a rebirth of pentecostal power in the American evangelical churches. The Latter-day Saints thus helped to revitalize a literal expectation of the fulfillment of biblical promises that had long been explained away.

In similar but even grander fashion, the Book of Mormon shared as well in what believers thought was the restoration of Christian expectations of the literal fulfillment of prophecies of the last days. It offered supporting testimony on behalf of the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, and defined more precisely than the Bible did what their mysterious passages might mean. To be sure, during the succeeding years of Adventist excitement, Smith and the Mormon evangelists in England and America resisted the detailed speculations about the date of Christ's return which obsessed the Millerites. The reason was not a preference for place over time, I think, but the undeniably biblical doctrine that the Jews must return to Jerusalem in the last days. No wonder Parley Pratt, when he got to England, read with such keen interest the works of the "celebrated Jewish missionary" Joseph Wolff. 76

The Book of Mormon added the parallel promise that those who by faith and baptism became Latter-day Saints were God's people also, chosen in "the eleventh hour." They, too, should gather in Zion — the New Jerusalem — before Christ should return. This latter promise set Mormons to work. Though premillennialists, they must prepare the way of the Lord by uniting under his kingship now and accepting all the commands which came from the mouth of his prophet. They thus laid upon themselves the responsibility to hasten the millennium, much as the main body of American and English evangelicals,

71Smith, "Righteousness and Hope," pp. 35-37.
75Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, pp. 135, 145.
called postmillennialist, had accepted responsibility to prepare a kingdom for the King.\textsuperscript{77}

The doctrine of gathering, applied thus to both Jews and Latter-day Saints and sustained by appeals to both the Bible and the Book of Mormon, gave powerful support not only to millenarian doctrines but to the preference for a literal interpretation of scripture which they sustained.\textsuperscript{78} The outcome was to provide Protestants with another set of handles by which to bind together the Old and the New Testaments, and a motivation grounded in awe about the future by which to recover reverence for the ancient past.

Viewed in this light, the Saints perceived themselves to have caught hold of the little end of the biggest thing in the universe — a cornucopia of unimaginable blessings promising “the riches of eternity,” the elders said in 1831, to “those who are willing to live by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”\textsuperscript{79} These riches they could share with the whole world, and with every ancestor whose name they could learn. One did not have to feel marginal to the existing social and economic order to opt for such an inheritance. Yeomen and craftsmen, captains and queens could recognize the infinite value of this “pearl of great price.”\textsuperscript{80}

Turning now more briefly to the other side of the complex relationship between Mormonism and biblical culture, it seems evident also that Joseph Smith and the early apostles relied upon the Bible to establish the credibility of both the Book of Mormon and the revelations recorded in his Doctrine and Covenants. A large portion of their preaching and teaching consisted of appeals to biblical arguments. Perhaps nowhere is this more clear or crucial than in the tracts which the brothers Parley and Orson Pratt published in the early years of their witness in Great Britain.

Parley Pratt’s \textit{A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People} was intended, as the subtitle put it, to be “an introduction to the faith and doctrine of the . . . Latter-day Saints.” The first three chapters rested the doctrine on the tradition of prophecy in the Old and New Testaments. And they displayed a literalism in the exposition of that tradition which rivals that of John N. Darby, founder and lifelong leader of the most important English millenarian movement, the Plymouth Brethren. These chapters, comprising half the book, did not appeal at all to the Book of Mormon, though they displayed on every page its passion for certainty, clarity, and immediately understandable authority in religion. The literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies recorded in later passages of the Bible or in secular history were proof that Christians should expect an equally literal fulfillment of prophecies in the New Testament concerning the Second Coming, the establishment of the kingdom of God on

\textsuperscript{78}Anticipating by several decades the merging of these two tendencies which Sandeen describes in \textit{Roots of Fundamentalism}, pp. 103-31.
\textsuperscript{79}Hill, \textit{Smith}, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{80}Flanders, \textit{Nauvoo}, pp. 62-67, presents evidence which denies the working-class interpretation of the origins of evangelical dissent so dear to English scholars; cf. Towle, \textit{Vicissitudes}, in Mulder and Mortensen, \textit{Among the Mormons}, p. 60.
earth, and a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days.\textsuperscript{81} Scorning the long tradition of spiritualizing the meanings of such prophecies, Pratt commented that it was fortunate that Noah, Abraham, Lot, and Joseph were not “well versed in the spiritualizing systems of modern divinity.”\textsuperscript{82} Such spiritualizing denied what to Mormons seemed the literal fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy of the appearance of the kingdom of God among the Latter-day Saints.\textsuperscript{83} Even worse, it had impoverished Christianity by destroying hope for the continued inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the church.

The event of Pentecost, Pratt went on to explain, was not simply history but prophecy. It declared both what individual Christian experience involved — faith and baptism by water, and then, as he put it here, remission of sins through the baptism of the Holy Spirit — and what God’s latter-day kingdom would be like. It required a king (Jesus Christ; Pratt did not at this point mention the prophet); apostles commissioned by Christ and empowered with the miraculous gifts promised in Mark 16:15-18; and the presence of the Holy Ghost “to guide into all truth, bring all things to remembrance, . . . show them things to come and enable them to speak with other tongues.”\textsuperscript{84} If scripture intended to teach that these signs were limited to the apostolic age, he wrote, then Christ must also have intended to confine to that era his command to go into all the world and preach the gospel\textsuperscript{85} — an interpretation he knew nineteenth-century evangelicals would find unthinkable.

Even Pratt’s later chapter on the last days grounded the truth of the Book of Mormon on scripture. He argued that the new revelation supplemented the Bible chiefly by clarifying it. Isaiah’s prophecy of a forerunner testified not only to John the Baptist but to Joseph Smith, a latter-day voice in the wilderness preparing the way of the Lord.\textsuperscript{86} From many other passages of Isaiah, as well as from Ezekiel’s vision of the “dry bones” and from the 102nd Psalm, Pratt continued, we learn that “there is a set time to build up Zion, or the city of which Isaiah wrote”; that “when this city shall be built, the Lord will appear in his glory, and not before”; and that “the people and kingdoms are to be gathered together to serve the Lord, both in Zion and in Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{87}

A few years later Orson Pratt buttressed his argument in the \textit{Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon} with even more literal interpretations of the Bible. Daniel’s description of God smiting the great beast with a stone “cut out of the mountain without hands” seemed to him, as to many Saints before and since, a clear reference to the kingdom being hewn out in the mountains of Utah. Isaiah’s prophecy of a nation “brought down” and speaking “out of the ground” was an equally clear prediction of the disclosure to Joseph Smith of the golden plates on which a nation brought low by God’s judgment had left behind

\textsuperscript{81}P. Pratt, \textit{Voice of Warning}, pp. 9-49, \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{82}Ibid., pp. 12, 13.
\textsuperscript{83}Ibid., pp. 16-17.
\textsuperscript{84}Ibid., pp. 56-57.
\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., 53-54.
\textsuperscript{86}Ibid., 96-99.
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., pp. 104-6, \textit{passim}.
the words of its prophets.\textsuperscript{88} Pratt also laid out what was by then the conventional Mormon argument that the description in Ezekiel, chapter 37, of two scrolls, one for Judah and the other for Joseph, clearly predicted a second scripture to be given for the descendants of the tribe of Ephraim after they had migrated to America.\textsuperscript{89}

Those whom such arguments convinced were also told, however, that the same passage, literally interpreted, freed the theology of the Saints from bondage to biblical literalism. In Mormon understanding, both the Hebrew and the Nephite scriptures promised a renewal of prophecy in the last days that would provide an infallible interpretation of their teachings and, by inspiration of the Spirit, such revisions of their contents as the sovereign God should will. English cleric Charles Mackay saw at once the challenge of these views of inspiration to the Protestant tendency “to substitute for the idolatry of the priest the idolatry of the book” and to neglect the Bible’s own word that “where there is no vision the people perish.” Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mackay remembered, “felt the burden of the Protestant yoke in this particular,” and in one of his lectures had declared “that its teaching is equivalent to an admission that ‘God is dead.’ ”\textsuperscript{90}

I cite the brothers Pratt at length only because of the unusual clarity and thoroughness of their treatments; they wrote within what was by then a well-established apologetic tradition that Joseph Smith himself had begun, in his Doctrine and Covenants. The introduction to that volume consisted of seven lectures on faith delivered before the first elders at Kirtland, Ohio. The opening one, Charles Mackay pointed out later, rejected, as John Wesley had, the notion that saving faith consisted only of speculative belief. Rather, such faith involved the experience of a “principle of power,” both human and divine. By that principle “the worlds were framed” as well as believers’ lives transformed; and experiencing it depended upon the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{91} Although the Book of Mormon contained many passages that would have sustained this view, the lectures appealed extensively to such favorite Wesleyan texts as Hebrews 11, Romans 8, Matthew 5:2-12, 48, John 17, Ephesians 3:19, and II Corinthians 3:18. By faith, Christians were to be changed into the image of Christ, “even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” They were to be “filled with all the fulness of God” and become “perfect even as their Father in heaven is perfect,” whether they were Jews or Gentiles.\textsuperscript{92}

Indeed, the prophet’s revelations published in the Doctrine and Covenants expounded and appealed to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures on almost every page. They make clear, as the important revelation concerning


\textsuperscript{89} O. Pratt, \textit{Divine Authenticity}, pp. 94-95.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., pp. 26-28, 31-32; Mackay, \textit{Mormons}, p. 293.


\textsuperscript{92} D&C, Lectures 1:13, 5:2 and 7:7, 10-12.
the sacraments and the structure of the restored church declares, that ministering angels had by the Book of Mormon "declared unto the world" that "the Holy Scriptures are true, and that God does inspire men and call them to his holy work in this age and generation,... thereby showing that he is the same God yesterday, today, and forever." Smith's statement in the Wentworth letter of 1842 seems precisely accurate: The scriptures he declared had been buried for so long in the Hill Cumorah were destined to "come forth and be united with the Bible for the accomplishment of the purposes of God in the last days."

Little wonder that in his first months at Kirtland, the prophet gave so much of his time and energy, under what he declared was the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to a new "translation" of the New Testament, beginning with the Gospel according to St. Matthew. The alterations of the King James Version were few indeed. What the effort demonstrated was not the distance but the close parallels the early Saints and their first converts saw between the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

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93 D&C 20:11-12.
95 Hill, Smith, pp. 131, 153.
TANNER LECTURES ON MORMON HISTORY

The Mormon History Association is grateful to the Obert C. and Grace A. Tanner Foundation for funding the Tanner Lectures on Mormon History. The first two of these, presented at the 1980 annual meeting of the Association, held at Canandaigua, New York, are:


The 1981 Tanner Lecture on Mormon History, scheduled for presentation at Ricks College, Rexburg, Idaho, on May 2, by John E. Wilson, Collord Professor of Religion, Princeton University, will be entitled, “Church and State in America: The Early Mormon Movement in Comparative Perspective.”
Joseph Smith’s First Vision: 
The RLDS Tradition

By Richard P. Howard

I beg your forbearance for a brief autobiographical aside. Thirty years ago 
this month, just at a crucial point in the development of my religious interests 
and commitment, I was asked by leaders of a youth group in my home town of 
Independence, Missouri, to play the part of Joseph Smith, Jr., in a one-act 
drama. The setting was to be the inception of the Latter Day Saint faith. I 
accepted the task with some feelings of inadequacy, and yet I was eager to 
revive an old interest: acting before a live audience.

So it was, early in the evening of a beautiful clear day in the spring of 
nineteen hundred fifty, that I spoke from memory what Joseph Smith, Jr., had 
caused to be published in 1842 in the Times and Seasons: his “official” narrative 
of the First Vision in the grove near his father’s home in Manchester, New 
York. I count that dramatic experience as strengthening my attachment to 
Latter Day Saintism, with but one qualification, which I shall mention in a 
moment. I recited lines symbolizing a primal encounter between God and 
Joseph Smith, Jr. — an encounter that had had great impact on the audience 
hearing my recitation. That experience gave me my initial personal identifica-
tion with Joseph Smith, with that 1950 audience, and with the sense of destiny 
that connected them. Here was a community holding implicit faith in the 
Restoration, and there I was, gaining a new awareness of becoming an integral

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Day Saints, Independence, Missouri. This paper was the basis of comments on the First Vision 
presented at the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the Mormon History Association, Canandaigua, New 
York, May 1, 1980.
part of that community in a most unique way; and to a degree that in retrospect still gives me a bit of a tingle along my spine.

The qualification I mentioned is a little harder to articulate. Many of the specifics of Joseph Smith's "official" version, together with the inferences that might be drawn from those specifics to contribute to a doctrinal system, never became vital to my identity as a Latter Day Saint. Such inferences as an anthropomorphic God, verbal inspiration largely propositional in nature, all other religious traditions as images of apostacy, and exclusivistic authoritarianism as a vital mark of the "one true church"—these very meaningful inferences discernible in the language of the *Times and Seasons* account of the First Vision never took root in my thought and feeling. I was, to put it simply, overwhelmed with the centrality of God and Christ in the inception and mission of the Restoration in the world. That was the larger meaning of the vision to me then, and, despite a more sophisticated historical consciousness that has developed since then, that meaning has survived to this day.

Quite truthfully it is impossible for one to characterize or generalize with any great degree of certainty regarding the RLDS tradition touching the matter of Joseph Smith's First Vision. Considering the tens of thousands of RLDS people that have lived in that tradition, only a handful have actually left behind a written record of what that vision had meant to them and to their faith in God and in the church. In view of that the wisest, most courageous, and humblest thing to do would be simply to sit down, let Grant McMurray respond, and open the floor to discussion.

But I believe that in the body of published literature of the RLDS church have appeared small but significant clues that may help us to identify something of the character and substance of any definable First Vision tradition.

As one might suspect, writers in the very early RLDS publications—nearly to the turn of the century—found little reason to refer to the First Vision. The explanation for this lack of reference rests in part with the character of the concerns which the published writings do reveal, and I shall mention only five:

1. The concern for lineal succession in presidency. This was the major burden of the early Reorganization's first publication, *A Word of Consolation to the Scattered Saints* (1852). All of the early Reorganization's periodical literature contained frequent arguments in support of the inherent right of Smith family heirs to the prophetic office in the Restoration. And such arguments obviously did not need authentication from the First Vision of Joseph Smith for legitimation.

2. Polygyny. From the outset a primary ingredient in the Reorganization's missionary, periodical, and pastoral literature was the concerted attack on plural marriage. The main thrust of these arguments during the first three decades of the Reorganization was on the basic evil of polygyny per se; after that, RLDS writers increasingly sought to dissociate the name of Joseph Smith, Jr., from any complicity in the inception of Mormon polygyny. Whatever the burden of the arguments at whatever time, there was clearly no pressing call for references to the First Vision for validation.

3. The quest for re-claiming what were regarded as "lost souls"; i.e., Mormons of various stripes who needed to be restored to the banner of the
truest expression of original Mormonism. Trying to reach that audience meant addressing those who already believed in the divinely appointed mission of the original founder; these needed no proof or arguments verifying the First Vision account as they had known it from the *Times and Seasons* in 1842.

4. The experimentation continuously occupying RLDS leaders and members from the beginning, in order to fashion church order and polity, and to define administrative and ecclesiastical function and authority. Clearly such machinations of an in-house character required no consideration of accounts of the First Vision.

5. Another major subject in RLDS literature through the decades has been Zion and the gathering. Literally hundreds of major articles have appeared on one aspect or another of this concern from the early 1860s to the present time. Again, the First Vision and its meaning in our history do not impinge on such a theme.

There are other important aspects of RLDS thought and history and writings relevant to this explanation for the sporadic treatment of the First Vision in the church’s literature, but these five should illustrate my point sufficiently for present purposes.

In the attempt to elucidate some elements of the RLDS tradition in the church’s published literature, with respect to the first vision of Joseph Smith, a sort of spot check survey — focusing around the start of each new decade — of a wide range of missionary, pastoral, and periodical resources was made. The time span of this survey went from the earliest days of the Reorganization to the present. For our purposes here we have isolated nine distinct ideas or concepts related to the First Vision appearing in RLDS literature. I shall try to state each idea generally, mention the frequency of its appearance in the survey, and usually indicate when it was first found and most recently expressed.

1. An idea mentioned a total of eighteen times from 1909 to 1972 is the First Vision as having been an essential step in the restoration of the gospel and of revelation, or both. In some cases the idea is more strongly expressed in terms of the First Vision as being the actual restoration of the Divine-human communication process and the gospel, not merely an essential aspect of that restoration. The kinds of literature in which this idea is found is wide ranging: educational materials for children, youth, and adults; a movie script in 1972; history books; tracts; sermons; and doctrinal treatises.

2. Next in importance is an idea expressing the relationship of the Restoration to other denominations. Some of the key phrases come from the final account published by Joseph Smith in 1842: “Join none of them,” “all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines,” “their creeds are an abomination in my sight.” This idea, found ten times in the survey, was either explicitly or implicitly cited as central to the experience itself, and not a conclusion Joseph might later have come to when formulating his accounts of the experiences. It was first expressed in a mild form by Marietta Walker in

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1 I am indebted to Keith Henry of the RLDS History Commission staff for assistance with this survey.
1888 in a story for youth in her magazine, *Autumn Leaves*, there she simply says that the First Vision answered Joseph's question as to which church to join.\(^2\) Most of the other nine references were of that character. F. Henry Edwards, in his adult study text, *Fundamentals*, writing in 1940, put this idea most positively when he simply said, "and finally the experience of Joseph satisfied him as to his attitude toward denominations of his time. The Lord proposed to build his church."\(^3\) This idea of RLDS exclusivist authority has surfaced in recent years in different ways, in part as a reaction to ecumenical tendencies in the church. In the recent 1980 World Conference several resolutions from church jurisdictions strongly expressing the idea of the exclusive authority of the Restoration (Reorganization) came to the floor for discussion and action. All of them were defeated by a large majority of votes, and in their place, adopted by a vast majority of the nearly three thousand voting delegates, was a resolution encouraging church jurisdictions to engage in various interdenominational ministries for community and world betterment. This raises a question as to the degree of acceptance or rejection by RLDS people of today of the idea of exclusive sectarian authority as expressed in Joseph Smith's final account of the First Vision. It also suggests the possibility, as yet untested and unmeasured, that a heightened historical consciousness by RLDS people generally helps them to see a distinction between the First Vision and Joseph's later interpretations of it.

3. The idea next in importance has usually been expressed in general terms, during the fifty year period from 1920 to 1970; that is, that the First Vision is the foundation of the Restored Church, that it represents the birth, or, rebirth of the church in modern times. As Vida E. Smith wrote in *Autumn Leaves* in 1920, celebrating the centennial of the First Vision, the Grove experience "unlocked — one hundred years ago — the chain that bound the church."\(^4\) This is a most powerful idea, in that if it is accepted without question at an early age, then Joseph's final account is usually accepted also, almost literally. Later, the discovery of the fact of the multiple and diverse accounts of the First Vision can lead one believing the First Vision to be "foundational" either to deny, rationalize, or ignore the evidence entirely.

4. Five writers from 1891 to 1919 stressed the idea that the important founding events in the restoration of the gospel were the angelic visitations to Joseph Smith from 1823 to 1827 resulting in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. These writers did not mention the First Vision in their explanations of the origin of the church; for the most part they saw the year 1830 as the crucial time, and this colored their assessment of the conditioning events and factors leading to the establishment of the church.

5. One interesting practice on the part of five authors was simply to include the entire final account of Joseph Smith's First Vision in their narrative or lesson material, or to quote extensively from it, but to give no further

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\(^4\) Found on page 182 of the April 1920 issue (volume 33).
commentary on what it meant. A variety of resources are represented here, from cartoons for junior age children to the 1920 Autumn Leaves reprint of the Times and Seasons account from "Joseph Smith's History." Their idea was, "Let the First Vision speak for itself."

6. An idea emphasized by three writers, from 1911 to 1969, all of them writing to an audience of children, was that the First Vision illustrated the truth that God is unchangeable, speaking to his children today as he has always spoken. This is somewhat inconsistent with the notion of the apostasy, i.e., that long period of history during which God was apparently silent and the denominations became so alienated from God and abominable in their creedal positions. The idea of the unchangeable God has sometimes fostered the view of the unchangeable church as well, even though it also can contribute to a more sophisticated, processive view of history.

7. One aspect of the First Vision that received attention from 1929 until very recent times, from three publications in our survey, was the statement from Joseph's final account, "This is my beloved son; hear ye him." The idea derived from that is the centrality of Christ in the Restored Church. Without specific reference to the First Vision, much literature in the Reorganization in the past two decades has stressed incarnational theology, which attempts to direct the church to the lived-out implications of this idea, of the centrality of Christ for the church's mission today.

8. In the RLDS centennial programs for 1930, one playlet was written for inclusion in worship services. This playlet perhaps expressed the idea that the First Vision and the later Moroni visions of Joseph Smith were intimately related, as a sort of whole experience in ushering in the Restoration movement, and restoring angelic ministry.

9. One extremely significant idea encouraging a view of the Restoration as an evolving process, never ending, places the First Vision in that framework as one of the steps of the evolution of the church. First expressed by Roy A. Cheville in RLDS senior high educational materials in 1948, this idea has been revived in a much more comprehensive context by the First Presidency of the RLDS church in its paper entitled, "The Identity of the Church":

The Restoration movement's contribution to the understanding of God is that the Holy Spirit is constantly creating new occasions through which God's revelation in Christ may be shared with the world. The Restoration events that have occurred in our own history have special meaning in our fellowship because that fellowship grew out of this particular stream of revelatory history. From part of that history we discover insights into the nature of God's unending revelation to humankind. In our history a new church and a new surge of prophetic vitality emerged from the initial experiences of Joseph Smith, Jr. and those closely associated with him in ministry. The major emphasis was not upon the particularity of the event and the Book of Mormon, but it was upon the testimony of the revelation of God in Christ. From its earliest experiences the central theme of the Restoration movement has been that God does not leave the world without the witness of Christ and the guidance of the Spirit. In fact, the Restoration is founded upon the concept of the linear organic relationship of unfolding history. It

is a faith story about God's constant leading, supporting and intervening in the ongoing processes of human history. That history is a matrix of inseparable events connecting a continuous stream of generations of God's developing people.

God's presence in the world is not a "sometime" thing. The testimony of the Restoration is that God is not only in all past historical periods but is presently leading, guiding and blessing those who will follow.

The identity of our church as an organized institution springs from a particular surge of revelatory experiences. These revelatory experiences have characterized our history from the inception of the movement in New York State in the 1820s. By the eye of faith and by integrity of scholarship we can trace the fine threads of spiritual, intellectual and cultural development backward through God's action in history to the upper room where Jesus met with his disciples, to the acropolis of Athens, and to a band of fleeing slaves from the mud pits of Egypt. We do not believe in a God who tries for a while and gives up, but rather in the One who is from everlasting to everlasting, the same unchangeable God — unchangeable in the relentless quest to bring humankind into the Divine presence in the kingdom . . . and to develop . . . the Restoration from its separatist tendencies to the present insight that the Restoration is a process which must permeate human community from within. When we are honest about our own personal and corporate history, we realize that the apostasy and the Restoration were not events that happened one time in history but rather are processes continually at work among us.

I believe that one of the most significant dimensions of that interpretation of the Restoration by the RLDS First Presidency of today is, simply, that identifying the apostasy in terms of time frames or denominational representatives no longer is an appropriate institutional task. There is no denial of the actuality of the First Vision; rather, there is, in this 1979 stance by the RLDS First Presidency, the attempt to interpret all of Joseph's initial spiritual experiences in the broadest possible framework of the creative, redemptive, loving powers of God at work in all of human history.

Incidentally, in my teaching and lecturing activity in the RLDS church during the past five years, I have systematically brought to the attention of hundreds of our people in a wide range of settings, the substantive differences in half a dozen accounts of the First Vision. In this process of education, I have engaged in some rather lively discussions with church people about what those differences mean for our historical understanding and theological reflection. The going has not been easy, for some have at first been so threatened by the new historical data that they have suspected me of denying the actuality of the First Vision. But in continuing the conversations with them, and in correspondence, a heightened historical consciousness has emerged so that no longer does it seem necessary for many of them to equate Joseph Smith's later reconstructions and interpretations of the First Vision with the First Vision itself. They are coming to see the fundamental difference between event and interpretation, and the inevitable impact of later events on the interpretations of earlier events, and on the language chosen by Joseph Smith, Jr., to make those interpretations. On this basis I am led to conjecture that many RLDS people stand at the threshold of a genuine historical sophistication.

Indicative of this process is the forthcoming scholarly journal of the RLDS

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6RLDS First Presidency, paper presented on January 9, 1979, at Independence, Missouri, to appointees and staff executives and their spouses, pp. 5-7.
church as part of the sesquicentennial year, *Restoration Studies*, being edited by a former member of the First Presidency, Maurice L. Draper. He informed me on April 28, 1980, that my paper dealing with six variant accounts of the First Vision would be appearing in that journal. I had given the precursor of that article, in a much abbreviated form, in 1977 at the John Whitmer Historical Association meeting. Responding to it from a theological perspective was Robert Mesle, who is presently working at a much more definitive analysis and approach to the whole area of Latter Day Saint beginnings. The RLDS tradition, in short, is taking some interesting turns, the significance of which is not as yet easily seen or predicted.

In any event, RLDS historians, theologians, poets, artists, linguists, deeply moved and augmented by the presence of the wondrously diverse and conflicting accounts of the First Vision, can begin the exciting work of developing a mythology of Latter Day Saint beginnings. This could be a mythology that transcends preoccupation with minute historical details that can never be fitted together in any sort of air-tight chronology: a mythology that discerns the most sublime symbolic possibilities in the accounts and begins to tell a new story of the founding and development of Latter Day Saintism. Such a story should always include the first vision of Joseph Smith, Jr., in his boyhood in New York. But it would free the RLDS tradition once and for all from the boundaries of so-called scientific history. Such a story would be at once cause for celebration and channel of power of the Holy Spirit. That spirit sends us forth, ambassadors for Christ to bind up the broken hearted in a world sorely in need of a new Vision of God at work — in the midst of the brokenhearted.
Mormon History Association

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

Ricks College
Rexburg, Idaho
May 1-3, 1981

Program Committee: Davis Bitton, University of Utah, chairman; Jerry L. Glenn, Clare D. Vlahos, Merle Wells, David J. Whittaker

Local Arrangements: Lawrence G. Coates, Ricks College, chairman; Larry Wickham, Sherrel Davis, Richard Stallings

Members of the Mormon History Association will receive program and registration information by mail. For membership information, see inside front cover.

Plan Ahead for Future Annual Meetings

Seventeenth Annual Meeting: Weber State College, Ogden, Utah, 1982
Program Committee: Dennis Lythgoe, Massachusetts State College, Bridgewater, chairman
Local Arrangements: Richard C. Roberts, Weber College, chairman

Eighteenth Annual Meeting: Council Bluffs, Iowa/Omaha, Nebraska, 1983
"It all began in the year 1820, when a young man named Joseph Smith, Jr., went into a wooded grove to pray." With these or similar words, recited in a host of languages, Mormon missionaries begin recounting the dramatic story of Joseph Smith's First Vision, that pivotal event which is so central to the message of Mormonism that belief therein has become a touchstone of faith for the orthodox Mormon and Mormon convert. In fact, as James B. Allen wrote in his insightful article on the significance of the First Vision, "Belief in the vision is one of the fundamentals to which faithful members give assent. Its importance is second only to belief in the divinity of Jesus of Nazareth."¹ Not only does the First Vision establish the nature of the Godhead (which Joseph Smith himself would not fully develop until years later), and not only does the vision confirm that all churches are "an abomination" in the sight of God, it also suggests the need for a Restoration and hence a special mission for Joseph Smith. Thus the vision prepares the way for the appearance of other heavenly personages, especially the 1823 and subsequent appearances of Moroni and the eventual delivery of the golden plates and their translation as The Book of Mormon.

Yet, as James B. Allen, Milton V. Backman, Jr., and Dean C. Jessee have pointed out in their studies of the event,² the First Vision was not immediately

²See ibid.; Milton V. Backman, Jr., Joseph Smith’s First Vision (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971);
given the importance in Mormon theology that it would later achieve. Indeed, as these scholars have noted, published accounts of the First Vision were, from our perspective, surprisingly slow to appear, and early Mormon missionaries placed The Book of Mormon, and not the vision of the Father and the Son, at the center of the message to the world. "There is little if any evidence," Allen asserts, "that by the early 1830's Joseph Smith was telling the story in public." In fact, it was apparently not until some twelve years after the event that an account of the First Vision was written. Backman notes in Joseph Smith's First Vision that, "While non-Mormon newspapers of 1830 and later make reference to Joseph's claim that he had been visited by God, the earliest recorded recital of the First Vision that has been preserved...was dictated by Joseph to his scribe, Frederick G. Williams, between July 20, 1832, and November of that year." This important 1832 account was followed in 1835 by a short recital of the First Vision in which Joseph Smith recounted the event, as recorded by Warren Cowdery, to a "Jewish minister" named Joshua, the priestly name adopted by Robert Matthias. The third and most important account of the vision, dictated by Joseph in 1838 as part of his History of the Church, underwent several revisions before it was recorded by James Mulholland sometime in 1839. The other extant record of the vision as recorded by the Prophet Joseph is found in the letter which he sent to John Wentworth, editor of the Chicago Democrat, in 1841.

As Allen and Backman have pointed out in their studies of these accounts of the vision, the four narratives demonstrate a similarity in general content and a notable difference in particulars. Writes Allen, "The several variations in these and other accounts would seem to suggest that, in relating his story to various individuals at various times, Joseph Smith emphasized different aspects of it and that his listeners were each impressed with different things." The variations and amplifications in the account of the First Vision, as related by the Prophet Joseph and retold by a number of his contemporaries, make it clear that Joseph Smith made a succession of significant literary alterations in each of the four versions of the event. In fact, a close examination of these accounts reveals that in these renderings of the vision, Joseph Smith, Jr., made literary, structural, and stylistic changes which not only reflect his changing understanding of the event in the Sacred Grove, but also demonstrate that, in the accounts of 1832, 1835, 1838, and the Wentworth letter, Joseph moved from writing of his transcendent experience as a young man influenced by the


4Backman, Joseph Smith's First Vision, p. 122.
5Ibid., p. 125.
6Ibid.
8Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision,' " p. 42.
Protestant tradition of spiritual autobiography to writing profoundly of the event as the Leader, Restorer, and Prophet of a unique religious movement destined to growth and greatness.

I

When Joseph Smith, Jr., began to shape his recollections of his momentous vision into a narrative that would effectively impart his otherworldly experience to his hard-handed New York neighbors, it is natural that he would turn to a traditional form of spiritual autobiography familiar to him and those around him. In the several religious revivals in which Joseph and his neighbors had participated, they doubtless heard many accounts of the conversion of souls who had strayed, but who through grace were "born again." Though these accounts were delivered orally, dozens of such "born again" experiences of Joseph's contemporaries in upstate New York and the vicinity were eventually published, and the soaring, solemn, and often tedious witnesses of these latter-day St. Pauls-on-the-Hudson are still available in weathered, faded, and cracked tomes.

A study of some of these accounts reveals a common pattern in their renderings of spiritual awakenings. In the preface to his own account, written about 1670, James Fraser summarized the dominant shape of such spiritual autobiographies, and that of Joseph Smith, Jr., as well, when he wrote that, "I shall reduce what I have met with to these eight heads":

1. What hath been the Lord's carriage to me before I knew any thing of God, or had so much as the form of religion.
2. Some steps of God's providence while the Lord was drawing me to himself; or some preparation-work to my conversion, while my heart was not fully changed, but had only some appearance of godliness.
3. Some things concerning my conversion, the time and manner; and what immediately followed.
4. Of the sad and long decay that happened thereafter.
5. Relate some things touching my recovery out of that decay.
6. Some things that happened immediately after this recovery, for the space of four or five years.
7. Some things relating to my present condition, and some things I have observed in my experience.
8. Some particular mercies I have met with from the Lord at several occasions.

Within this broader framework there appears to be a pattern peculiar to the conversion experience itself: The sinner, wallowing in the slough of innate depravity, becomes intensely aware of his wickedness; he enters into a period of self-detestation; miserable, he turns for solace to prayer and study of the Holy Writ but generally encounters some kind of satanic opposition; after a period of sincere prayer, however, often in a woods or other secluded spot, he enjoys a supernatural epiphany during which he sees or senses the presence of Christ, obtains forgiveness for his sins, and undergoes a marvelous spiritual change; this experience awakens in him a sensitivity for the presence of God not only in

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himself but in all outward nature; he is then led to proclaim to others his
conversion and his new-found witness for Christ; and, though he still falters
from time to time, his ministry begins.

Typical, perhaps, of such experiences is that of Elder Jacob Knapp, of
Otsego County, New York. In 1816, at the age of seventeen, and four years
before Joseph's experience in the Sacred Grove, young Jacob gradually became
aware of his spiritual degeneracy. "I often repaired to the barn or the grove in
the silent hours of the night," he later wrote, "and poured out my soul in prayer
to God." Disturbed that he seemed to continue in his unregenerate state,
despite his sincere efforts, he wrote that, "At length, one Lord's day morning, I
took my Bible and hymn-book, and repaired to the woods, with a determina-
tion never to return without relief to my soul." In the grove he prayed and read
the scriptures and sang, but, he continues, "I felt my vileness; all my sins rose
before me like mountains. I thought I had prayed, read the Bible, attended
meetings, and done all that was in my power to do; and yet I seemed to grow
worse and worse, more and more despicable in the sight of God.... I felt myself
sinking down into despair." In the midst of this blackness of spirit, Knapp
related, "the earth seemed to open beneath me, and hell appeared to be
yawning for my reception."

Then it happened! Knapp closed his eyes, "expecting to open them no
more until I opened them in hell"; but suddenly he realized that his load of
guilt was gone. "I rose up quickly," he exclaimed, "turned my eyes towards
heaven, and I saw Jesus descending with his arms extended for my reception.
My soul leaped within me, and I broke forth into singing praises to the blessed
Savior." At once he became aware that nature seemed also to have undergone a
change:

The sweet melodies of the birds seemed to make harmony with my songs, and, as I
looked around me, the sun shone with a lustre not its own, the majestic trees, swaying
to the gentle breeze, appeared to bow in sweet submission to the will of Heaven. All nature
smiled, and everything, animate and inanimate, praised God with a voice (though
unheard before) too loud and too plain to be misunderstood.11

Completing the pattern, Knapp rejoices that Jesus had borne his personal
guilt and given him a witness that his sins were forgiven. Knapp immediately
began to look for the true church of God, and eventually was led by the spirit to
become a Baptist minister.

Elder Jacob Knapp's experience is not unusual. Other contemporaries of
Joseph Smith in New York and New England recorded similar experiences:
The Reverend Eleazar Sherman of Massachusetts followed the pattern in
1815;12 the Reverend Abel Thornton of Rhode Island had his sins forgiven by
a still, small voice in May 1820;13 the Reverend Jabez Swan of New York saw

14-15. See also Cross's discussion of Knapp in Burned-over District, pp. 196-97.
12Eleaer Sherman, The Narrative of Eleazer Sherman (Providence, 1832), vol. 1.
13Abel Thornton, The Life of Elder Abel Thornton (Providence, 1832).
Christ in 1821.\textsuperscript{14} Many others in the region left similar witnesses.\textsuperscript{15} Perhaps a good summary of these kinds of accounts, some of which may even have been familiar to Joseph Smith, Jr. — and to those who would persecute him because of his account — can be seen in the experience of the Reverend John J. Maffit. Maffit was an emigrant from Ireland to New London, Connecticut; in 1821 he wrote eloquently that he had been “the most abject wretch,” clearly doomed to hell,

\begin{quote}
When lo! — A light from heaven, broke in dazzling splendour thro’ the gloom — dispersed the cloud and shot its loveliest beams through all my powers — I look’d — the current of my sorrows ceased to flow — the mountains disappeared — and all was peace and joy. By faith I distinguished my adorable Savior — felt the efficacy of his death and sufferings — and was warmed by the tide of salvation that overwhelmed my soul. — I sunk, by dying love compelled, and owned him conqueror!
\end{quote}

Immediately, Maffitt noted the loveliness and beauty of the outer world and turned to the ministry. Speaking of himself, he concludes the account of his conversion with the soaring words, “See the fetters removed, while his happy spirit bounds with the delighted prospect of exalted liberty!”\textsuperscript{16}

Given the abundance of such spiritual autobiographies, oral and written, in New York and vicinity in 1820, the puzzle is not that Joseph Smith, Jr., would recount a spiritual experience which was in some ways similar to these other accounts, but that his account was so poorly received by those in whom he confided. Indeed, their collective rejection suggests that the story of Joseph Smith’s experience in the grove, as he related it to his associates in 1820, may have been strikingly different, in some notable way, from accounts of spiritual experiences with which they were already familiar.

II

It should come as no surprise that Joseph Smith, Jr., at age twenty-eight, and twelve years after his experience in the grove, should choose, consciously or unconsciously, to cast his initial written account of the First Vision into a literary style and structure similar to familiar conversion accounts spoken and written by his contemporaries.

Thus, when Joseph dictated his history to Frederick G. Williams in 1832, he attempted to couch his exalted experience in exalted prose, as his contemporaries were fond of doing. He would thus begin:

A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr an account of his marvelous experience and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Chist [sic] the son of the living God

\textsuperscript{14} Jabez Swan, The Evangelist; or, Life and Labors of Reverend Jabez S. Swan, ed. Rev. F. Denison (Waterford, Conn., 1873).


of whom he beareth record and also an account of the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time according as the Lord brought forth and established by his hand.17

And in such florid wording Joseph would speak of the professors of various faiths: “I discovered that they did not adorn their profession by a holy walk and Godly conversation agreeable to what I found contained in that Sacred depository [i.e., the Bible].” Young Joseph, then, very conscious of the importance of his account, could not resist the temptation to attempt to match his rhetoric to the event, particularly when doctors of divinity were recounting events of less importance in even higher-sounding phrases.

The language and structure Joseph used in shaping the 1832 account demonstrate other similarities to the spiritual autobiographies of his contemporaries. Like them, he found himself becoming “seriously imprest with regard to the all important concerns for the well fare of my immortal Soul,” which led him, with them, “to Searching the Scriptures.” Like them, he became “distressed,” for he was similarly “Convicted of [his] Sins” and mourned for his sins and for the sins of mankind (p. 156). After being filled with love for God, he, like his contemporaries, suddenly found nature transformed, and he wrote about, the sun the glorious luminary of the earth and also the moon rolling in their majesty through the heavens and also the Stars Shining in their courses . . . ; [and] my heart exclaimed all . . . these bear testimony and bespeak an omnipotent and omnipresent power a being who maketh Laws and decreeeth and bindeth all things in their bounds who filleth Eternity who was and is and will be from all Eternity to Eternity. . . . (pp. 156-57)

Following the well-established pattern in recounting a conversion, Joseph then relates that such recognition of God’s grandeur led him “to obtain mercy” from the Lord. “The Lord,” he continues, “heard my cry in the wilderness,” and appeared to him in a pillar of light (p. 157). Consistent with the Protestant pattern, he tells us, in the 1832 account, of only one personage and continues the familiar form by explaining that the Lord immediately told Joseph, “Thy Sins are forgiven thee, go thy way walk in my Statutes and keep my commandments.” Joseph further follows his contemporaries in pointing out that, after the experience, his “soul was filled with love and for many days [he] could rejoice with great joy.”

Then he adds the phrase which makes all the difference between his and the accounts of others, “but [I] could find none that would believe the heavenly vision” (p. 157). The careful reader must suspect that Joseph had told his auditors something more than he had included in his 1832 account of the First Vision. It is only in later recoundings that we are made aware of those claims that would immediately separate his experience from those of many others in the burned-over district and vicinity.

So the 1832 relation of the First Vision is strongly reminiscent of similar accounts by other spiritual men. In strained language Joseph recounts his experience as if it were primarily a vision granted to assure him of his personal

17Backman, “1832 Recital of the First Vision,” in Joseph Smith’s First Vision, p. 155; see also Jessee, “Early Accounts,” p. 278. Page numbers in the text refer to this and other accounts in Backman.
redemption and the need for men to repent, and not to assure him of the apostacy of all churches and the need for a Restoration.

In Joseph’s 1835 impromptu recital of the First Vision, as recorded by Warren Cowdery, the Prophet creates a kind of transition between his first published account of the vision, with its traditional form, its formal grammar, syntax and diction and its long, convoluted and soaring sentences, and his more carefully edited 1838 account. By 1835 he had come to a better capacity for expressing the uniqueness of his experience, which he was able to render in language and form more appropriate to his prophetic role and the destiny of the Restored Church.

In the 1835 account, Joseph begins to shift the emphasis of the experience from forgiveness of his personal sins to his greater concern regarding the “different systems” of religion in the world, and he notes that it was “of the first importance to me that I should be right, in matters of so much moment” (p. 158). And while he is traditional in recounting his visit to “the silent grove,” and was moved to do so, as were his contemporaries, by his reading of a particular scripture, he nevertheless introduces into the 1835 account the suggestion of specific satanic influence (pointing out that he was thwarted in his desire to pray aloud by a swollen tongue and by a noise behind him, “like someone walking towards” him in the grove), and he describes the unique experience of seeing two personages, as well as angels, in his open vision (p. 159).

Also of significance in this 1835 account is the simple and more confident style of the narration: “I kneeled again,” Warren Cowdery records Joseph as saying; “my mouth was opened and my tongue loosed; I called on the Lord in mighty prayer. A pillar of fire appeared above my head” (p. 159). Such spare prose, in contrast with the prose of 1832, prefigures the simple eloquence of the 1838 version, and combines with the shift in content to make the 1835 version less derivative and in many ways more effective than the 1832 account.

By the time Joseph Smith dictated the 1838 version of the First Vision, the transition from plow-boy to prophet was complete. This account of the original theophany thus takes on a significance far different from the earlier versions. Not only is this account, which apparently underwent several drafts, an interesting index to the changing ideas of Joseph Smith regarding his prophetic role in the Restoration, but it is also a narrative that achieves an interest and a meaning of its own, even apart from the man who first articulated the experience.

If the First Vision as it came to be shaped in 1838 were simply an expanded recounting of Joseph Smith’s revelatory experience, then there is much in the structure and style of the piece that raises questions. For instance, one of the important differences immediately apparent between this and the earlier versions is its restrained, straightforward, matter-of-fact style. The 1832 version,
as we have seen, was characterized by an elaborate, complicated syntax and a highly elevated, florid diction. One might argue that the change in style between 1832 and 1838 is merely a matter of the passage of time, that as the experience became further removed in time, so the sensory details simply faded away. However, it should be remembered that this same narrative includes a remarkably full and complete description of the Angel Moroni, a heavenly manifestation also many years past, yet vividly recalled.

But even more significant is the fact that the impressive, powerful, and overwhelming manifestation of the Savior in the Kirtland Temple (now recounted in Section 110 of the LDS Doctrine and Covenants) was relatively close in time. When Joseph dictated the lines of the 1838 version, not two years had elapsed since the Prophet had heard again the voice which had first spoken to him in the grove, and in response to which Joseph had written with eloquent and poetic grandeur: “His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah.”

The metaphorical language and the elaborate figures of speech are not only appropriate in this vision of 1836, but, as language, are remarkably successful. Only a poetic diction and a figurative language can carry the burden of the extraordinary experience being rendered here. And in that sense the metaphors and similes that Joseph uses are right: the eyes of fire, for instance, remind us of the frequent use of light and lightning to describe the face of the divine. Indeed, the heavenly pillar of Joseph’s First Vision is interchangeably referred to as one of light or of fire. Furthermore, the equation of the voice with the rushing of great waters suggests not only irresistible power and volume, but a terrible beauty, and, in the end, a source of life as well.

In 1838, then, when Joseph turned again to describing his First Vision, he could have written in considerable detail regarding those heavenly figures that appeared in the pillar of light in 1820. But as he dictated, he was content with the simple statement, “I saw two personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description)…” (p. 163). Indeed, although the sentences of the 1838 version are technically long, they are freer from embellishment, affectation, and rhetorical flourish than the versions of 1832, 1835, or Doctrine and Covenants 110. In comparison, the sentences in the 1838 account seem remarkably plain and unadorned. They employ for the most part, brief subject/verb structures, and simpler coordinating connectives, rather than the more complicated subordinating connectives of the earlier versions. The language itself is less high-blown and far more natural and restrained, using fewer and simpler adjectives and adverbs and concentrating more on nouns and verbs to carry the burden of meaning. Indeed the prose is so free from emotionally loaded words and phrases as to make us almost forget the cosmic significance of the events being recounted.

There are other differences, among these accounts, differences less subtle

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20Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, section 110, verse 3.
and more significant. For instance, the prologue to the 1838 version announces a striking shift in emphasis regarding the purpose of Joseph’s narrative. As noted earlier, in the 1832 account the emphasis is on Joseph himself. It is “a history of the life of Joseph Smith Jr. [and] an account of his marvelous experiences and of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Ch[r]ist . . .” But in 1838, Joseph was writing about “the rise and progress of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” with the purpose of presenting “the facts as they have transpired in relation both to myself and the Church as far as I have such facts in possession” (p. 10). The subtle shift in emphasis from the personal to the institutional is significant.

The Prophet’s concern in the 1838 version, then, is not so much his own sins as it is the question, which church is right? In 1832, Joseph wrote “I became convicted of my Sins ... and I felt to mourn for my own Sins and for the Sins of the world” (p. 156), and so he went to the woods, he notes in that version, to “obtain mercy.” But by 1838 the concern for personal sin and expiation has almost entirely disappeared. Indeed it is no longer a question of sin; it is a question of knowledge. It is not Joseph’s own soul that is the focal center, but rather the direction in which all men must turn in order to find salvation.

A third important consideration in this most complete version is the relative space given to the separate events. Considering the central nature of the first appearance of the Father and the Son, one might think of it as forming a sort of structural highlight within the narrative itself. Interestingly, the vision as such is given comparatively little space, a fact made plain when we set that episode alongside some of the other parts of the narrative. For instance, Joseph devotes well over twice as many words to the persecution that followed the vision as he does to the actual vision itself. And the experience with Moroni takes up more than four times the space given to the original theophany. While word counting alone is not a sure indication of the relative significance of any particular event, we cannot forget the human tendency to elaborate those matters that are most important. Thus the rhetorical context of the First Vision makes clear that Joseph’s inquiry and the subsequent persecution seem to be at least as significant in the plan of the narrative as the heavenly appearance.

Indeed the First Vision’s larger setting in the “Joseph Smith Story” has become a matter of deep significance for Mormons as they reiterate the well-known story in Church services and in missionary discussions. For while the First Vision is an important matter itself, its telling almost always anticipates the recounting of the appearances of several other heavenly messengers. Thus the appearances of the Angel Moroni and John the Baptist are also fundamental, well-known, and important parts of the account, and together form a recital so familiar as almost to shape a litany which could be repeated in concert by most gatherings of Mormons. It gathers up in itself the essential beginnings not just of the theology, the literature, and the authority, but of the whole religious movement. It reiterates in a profound way the origins not just of another church or even another movement, but of a whole new religious tradition.

The Joseph Smith Story in its completeness is, then, not just a series of
interesting episodes in our historical literature. It has come to function on a deeper level of our collective psyche as the true narrative of the sacred origins of this last dispensation. As a recitation, the several visions have their own significance and function within the culture, a significance that transcends the particular experience of any one person. Even more than the institutional beginnings that we recognize this sesquicentennial year, the Joseph Smith Story relates how, by the interposition of supernatural beings, the new dispensation itself came into being. Furthermore, the story is a narrative, the acceptance or “knowing” of which is a mark of true initiation into the fold of the church, and an experience which can be, in essence, repeated “in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or re-enacted.\footnote{Mircea Eliade, \textit{Myth and Reality} (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 19.}

One recognizes here, of course, the language of Mircea Eliade in his discussion of the structure and function of myths. Eliade’s revealing analysis is important to our discussion. For if it is true that Mormonism represents a new religious tradition, then a narrative of mythic dimensions that relates the origins of that tradition becomes imperative for the true believers. The concern here is with the remarkable way in which the Joseph Smith Story functions in the patterns that Eliade outlines for a religious myth. That mythic narrative, he points out, has several characteristic qualities as it functions in certain societies:

In general it can be said that myth . . . (1) constitutes the History of the acts of the Supernaturals; (2) that this History is considered to be absolutely true (because it is concerned with realities) and sacred (because it is the work of the Supernaturals); (3) that myth is always related to a “creation,” it tells how something came into existence, or how a pattern of behavior, an institution, a manner of working were established; . . . (4) that by knowing the myth one [possesses] a knowledge that one “experiences” ritually, either by ceremonially recounting the myth or by performing the ritual for which it is the justification. [In the case of the Joseph Smith Story, going out by oneself into the woods and expecting answers to prayer]; (5) that in one way or another one “lives” the myth, in the sense that one is seized by the sacred, exalting power of the events recollected or reenacted.\footnote{Eliade, \textit{Myth and Reality}, pp. 18-19.}

Understanding Eliade’s criteria for a mythic narrative helps us to understand the shifting emphases in the narrative of Joseph Smith, to understand why the later versions move towards an emphasis on religious origins and away from concerns with private absolution, and to realize why the Joseph Smith Story is presently told more in the straight-forward manner of religious mythos and sacred history and less in the received modes of spiritual autobiography.

Eliade’s pattern also helps explain the important function and form of the canonized Joseph Smith 2 in the Pearl of Great Price, with its narrative series of epiphanies and persecutions. The 1838 version thus becomes at once a paradigm of the religious experience by which one may confirm the reality of the new dispensation, and a religious experience itself. The proper telling and hearing of the narrative allow one, in a sense, to “relive” for himself the sacred origins of his faith.
Thus it is appropriate that the narrative be less and less characterized by received modes of personal interior experience, and more and more characterized by an emphasis on common experience and tangible actuality. That the events be real is of the utmost importance, and it is that actuality that becomes more and more a part of the sacred history of 1838. Thus the rather vague, “the Lord heard my cry in the wilderness,” of the 1832 account (p. 157); becomes in 1838 the definite “beautiful clear” spring morning in the woods of the Sacred Grove, details which are now essential in the standard recitation of the story (p. 162). Such need for reality helps explain, too, why Joseph makes particular his struggles of that morning, that he was about to succumb “not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world” (p. 163; our italics). The experience as we finally have it, then, is cosmic in its significance, yet thoroughly set down on the solid stuff of worldly experience.

The difference between a sacred narrative of this sort and a work of secular fiction can perhaps be best underlined by repeating a few lines from a novelist’s attempt to render Joseph Smith’s experience of the First Vision:

He saw first an intimation of brightness far out in the universe: it grew like the softness of morning, like a gentle flowering out of utter darkness, as if heaven were overflowing the wastelands of night as brilliance spilled from God’s robe as He walked. For a long moment the light spread and gathered strength and then suddenly fell downward in a broad beam of terrible splendor, in a great and blinding pillar that touched the earth and lay far out in a white column of eternity. Then, with startling swiftness, two persons appeared in this stupendous shaft of light, the Father and the Son; and they were exactly alike in countenance and in the incandescence of their glory. They walked down the beam as down a highway of light; and one called the prostrate lad by name and pointed to his companion and said, “This is my beloved Son. Hear Him!”

And the vision ends: “The voice died away in echoes that rolled in solemn music, and the highway of light slowly faded, with Father and Son standing as vanishing silhouettes against the infinite. The light closed like a shutter to a thin wraith of holiness and slowly withdrew to the lone glittering point of a star.”23

The difference is obvious. It is not a difference that is entirely explicable by the fact that one writer was a nineteenth century farmboy and the other a twentieth century professional, for as has been shown, Joseph Smith had considerable skill with the poetic language of the religious experience. It is not appropriate either to ask which account is preferable, for separate literary modes have separate functions. The fictional account by Vardis Fisher in Children of God draws deeply on the techniques available to the imaginative writer in order to engage the reader’s imagination — but in the end, that is all, for whether the experience recounted is either historical or sacred is not an essential concern of the novelist.

However, the Joseph Smith Story as we have come to know it in Mormon society is expected not only to excite interest and pleasure but to reveal an exemplary model for human activity of the highest significance — to support or to change our values and our assumptions about Man and God and the world.

The Joseph Smith Story, as Mormons have canonized it, is repeated, not as an aesthetic or historical artifact, but as a kinetic experience, meant to bring about either a religious reinforcement or a spiritual reformation in the life of the narrator as well as the listener. Its present shape and form make clear that it is not just a fantastic part of a remarkable religious history. It is, in the best sense of that word, a religious *myth* functioning to identify and mold a remarkable religious tradition.

We can perhaps better understand now why the Prophet Joseph wrote as he did in his letter to John Wentworth in 1841. At the height of his prophetic power, secure in the vision of the future of the Restoration, Joseph succinctly stated the essentials of the mature account of the divine origins of the Church: First, “upon enquiring the plan of salvation I found that there was a great clash in religious sentiment”; second, “I had confidence in the declaration of James: ‘If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God’”; third, “I retired to a secret place in a grove”; fourth, the theophany itself, “I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noonday”; fifth, “They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom”; and finally, “And I was expressly commanded to ‘go not after them,’ at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”24 Again, the plain style and the sense of origins combine to impress and to testify.

V

In celebrating the origins of Mormonism, it is appropriate to mark 1830 and Fayette, New York, as the time and place of institutional beginnings. But as we do so, it is even more appropriate to remember that the true origins of Mormonism center not so much in the Whitmer farmhouse as in that grove of hardwood trees where, as the Joseph Smith Story declares, “two heavenly personages” appeared to mark a beginning, not merely of an institution but of a religious experience which continues to be recreated in the life of each Latter-day Saint.

One of the barriers to understanding history is the tendency many of us have to superimpose upon past generations our own patterns of thought and perceptions of reality. This is partly the result of giving too little thought to the historical development of ideas. In Mormon history, for example, we are well aware of the many changes that have taken place in church organization and practices in the past 150 years, but we are tempted to assume that ideas and perceptions have remained relatively unchanged, especially since the death of Joseph Smith. Only recently have Mormon historians begun to study in detail the historical development of ideas within the church but such a study, if complete, could provide valuable insight into why some concepts have changed from generation to generation while others have remained constant as pillars of the faith. It would also demonstrate the relationship of ideas to each other, and the changing role of basic concepts in such important functional activities as testimony building, missionary work, and the development of teaching programs. This paper explores one example of changing perceptions within the Mormon community: its growing awareness and changing use of Joseph Smith's First Vision.

Next to the resurrection of Christ, nothing holds a more central place in modern Mormon thought than that sacred event of 1820. It is celebrated in poetry, song, drama, and nearly all the visual arts; it forms the basis for the first
missionary discussion; no Latter-day Saint publication that touches on early church history leaves it out; sermons and lessons expounding upon the doctrine of God almost invariably use the vision to illustrate several aspects of that doctrine. The most sacred event in church history, a belief in its literal reality is fundamental to belief in Mormonism itself. But the First Vision was not always so well known or frequently used by the general membership of the church. Only in 1838 did Joseph Smith prepare an account of it for official publication; not until 1840 did any account appear in print; and not for another half-century was it publicly discussed with great regularity or used for the wide variety of purposes to which it lends itself today.

Let me clarify at the outset that when I use the term “First Vision” here, I am referring to detailed accounts of the vision — accounts that specifically call attention to Joseph Smith’s initial religious quest, his prayer in the grove, and the grand theophany he experienced there. References to a common understanding that Joseph had received instructions from God, or had even experienced his presence, do not demonstrate that the details of the vision were fully known. It is the detailed accounts that concern us here, and the question is when and why the vision as a descriptive report began to assume its present role in Mormon thought.1

The First Vision occurred in 1820 — a historic reality. But it did not become a perceived reality by the general Mormon community until that community heard about it and understood it. Clearly we have no way of knowing what every Mormon knew or believed at any given moment, for contemporary journals simply are not that complete on this issue. Nor do we know all that Joseph Smith was publicly teaching, for so many of his sermons went unrecorded. But to the degree that printed sources reveal what Mormons generally understood we can at least begin to appreciate how and why their awareness of the First Vision went through a significant metamorphosis in the first century of Latter-day Saint history.2

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1I asked this question, along with others, in an article printed some fourteen years ago. See James B. Allen, “The Significance of Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Mormon Thought,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 1 (Autumn 1966):28-45. The other questions raised there have been answered rather fully by myself and other students, but this one was treated only briefly and perfunctorily. It has continued to intrigue me, and this essay is an attempt to put the issue in a more complete and interpretive framework than I had time to do or was capable of doing then. See also Milton V. Backman, Joseph Smith’s First Vision: The First Vision in Historical Context (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971); Dean C. Jessee, “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” Brigham Young University Studies 9(Spring 1969):275-94; Richard L. Anderson, “Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision Through Reminiscences,” ibid., pp. 373-404; James B. Allen, “Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision: What Do We Learn from Them?” Improvement Era 73(April 1970):4-13; Wesley P. Walters, “New Light on Mormon Origins From the Palmyra Revival,” Dialogue; A Journal of Mormon Thought 4(Spring 1969):60-81; Richard L. Bushman, “The First Vision Story Revived,” ibid., pp. 82-93.

2This paper is based on a study of contemporary sources rather than reminiscences which could have been affected by the tendency of the writers to read their current understanding into past experiences. There are a few reminiscences, written many years after the events discussed here, that, if accurate, would at least partially negate some of the ideas presented here. The reminiscences of Edward Stevenson, for example, suggest that Joseph Smith was publicly telling the story of his first vision in great detail in the early 1830s. The reminiscence was written, however, some fifty years later, and on this issue it runs directly counter to all the available contemporary evidence. No one questions the personal integrity of Stevenson, but it is likely that after fifty years his memory
In the 1830s, long before historical accounts of the vision were circulated generally among the Saints, it was a common understanding among them that Joseph Smith had received direct and personal communication from God. References to this appeared often, but in the context of the times they did not necessarily imply to the Saints the details of the vision as they are known today. Only later, with the benefit of the published accounts, could these early statements be seen as clear allusions to that specific event of 1820. A basic revelation in 1830, for example, declared of Joseph Smith: “For, after that it truly was manifested unto this first elder, that he had received a remission of his sins, he was entangled again in the vanities of the world; but after truly repenting, God ministered unto him by an holy angel.” This certainly was no description of the Vision, but the allusion to receiving a remission of his sins conformed exactly with Joseph Smith’s later detailed accounts. There are many such oblique references in contemporary sources, including an anti-Mormon statement in the Palmyra *Reflector* in 1831 that Joseph Smith “had seen God frequently and personally.”

It is significant that early anti-Mormon literature did not attack Joseph Smith on the basis of his recitals of the First Vision, notwithstanding the abundance of Mormon statements originating a half-century later to the effect that bearing testimony of it was what caused his greatest trouble. Though he was criticized for telling the story when it first occurred, in later years the persecution heaped upon the Mormon prophet was associated with other things and the vision was of little or no significance in the minds of those who were the persecutors.

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2The Reflector (Palmyra, New York), February 14, 1831.

3Such statements leave the impression that all of the prophet's persecution was based largely on his telling of the vision. In 1906, for example, one church leader even attributed Joseph Smith's death to his testimony of the vision: “The greatest crime that Joseph Smith was guilty of was the crime of confessing the great fact that he had heard the voice of God and the voice of His Son Jesus Christ, speaking to him in his childhood; that he saw those Heavenly Beings standing above him in the air of the woods where he went out to pray. That is the worst crime he committed, and the world has held it against him…. Joseph Smith declared that it was true. He suffered persecution all the days of his life on earth because he declared it was true. He carried his life in his hands, so to speak, every moment of his life until he finally sacrificed it in Carthage jail for the testimony that he bore.” Joseph F. Smith, “Two Sermons by President Joseph F. Smith,” Sermon Tract No. 1, published by the Southern States Mission, Chattanooga, Tennessee (1906).

Beyond the possibility that Joseph Smith wanted to keep the details of his great theophany private because they were so sacred, there were at least two factors within the Mormon community of the 1830s that helped make it unnecessary or even inappropriate to lay out the vision as precisely as became the practice in the 1840s and thereafter, or to use it for the didactic purposes that are common today. One was a conscious effort among Mormon founders to avoid creeds and dogma.\(^7\) To the degree that the First Vision could lend itself to creating or supporting even a loose creedal statement about the personal characteristics of God, it simply would not have fit the rather open attitude toward doctrine that characterized the early years of the church. When the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants was being prepared for publication, some churchmen objected on the grounds that it could become too much like a creed.\(^8\) Joseph Smith, nevertheless, apparently felt it important to make certain carefully selected revelations generally available, though even in doing so he implied that everything in the publication was not necessarily binding on the conscience of the whole Mormon community. The preface stated: “We have, therefore, endeavored to present, though in few words, our belief, and when we say this, humbly trust, the faith and principles of this society as a body.”\(^9\) Nothing in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants could be construed as a creedal statement about the nature of God, though certainly the “Lectures on Faith,” bound in the same volume, came close. Even they, however, were not confessions or articles of faith — only transcriptions of lectures delivered before a theological class in Kirtland. Joseph Smith, moreover, continued to oppose the idea of rigid confessions of faith, even after he had allowed the First Vision to be published and had written his own “Articles of Faith.” As he told Josiah Butterfield in 1843:

The most prominent difference in sentiment between the Latter-day Saints and sectarians was, that the latter were all circumscribed by some peculiar creed, which deprived its members of the privilege of believing anything not contained therein, whereas the Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.\(^9\)

Later, he even criticized the high council in Nauvoo for trying Pelatiah Brown simply for making a doctrinal error.\(^10\)

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\(^7\)Professor Peter L. Crawley has developed this idea fully in an unpublished manuscript currently under revision. Copy in possession of author.

\(^8\)This led the editors (Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, Sidney Rigdon, and Frederick G. Williams) to write in the preface: “There may be an aversion in the minds of some against receiving anything purporting to be articles of religious faith, in consequence of there being so many now extant; but if men believe a system, and profess that it was given by inspiration, certainly the more intelligibly then can present it, the better. It does not make a principle untrue to print it, neither does it make it true not to print it.” Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter-day Saints (Kirtland: F. G. Williams & Co., 1835), p. 111.

\(^9\)Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 5:215.

\(^10\)I did not like the old man being called up for erring in doctrine. It looks too much like the Methodists, and not like the Latter-day Saints. Methodists have creeds which a man must believe or be asked out of their church. I want the liberty of thinking and believing as I please. It feels so good.
When this lack of emphasis on creed is coupled with a second factor in the early Mormon community, then the inappropriateness of using the First Vision as a device for teaching the nature of God seems apparent. That factor was the general perception of God which, in the 1830s at least, was different in several respects from the doctrines advanced by Joseph Smith in the 1840s and built upon in later years by other church leaders. We don’t pretend to know when Joseph Smith formulated the advanced doctrines he taught in the 1840s, or when he became convinced that the need to know God meant also the need to know of his finite, corporeal nature. We only know that he allowed other ideas to be circulated and saw no need publicly to contradict them until the 1840s.

What did the Mormons believe about the nature and character of God in the 1830s? Professor Thomas G. Alexander deals significantly with this subject in another context, but we must say enough about it here to illustrate why a detailed account of the First Vision, as Mormons think of and use it today, would have been unnecessary in the belief system of the Mormon community of the 1830s, and may even have been disturbing to some of the newly-converted Saints. It is not beyond possibility, of course, that Joseph Smith deliberately kept it from public circulation partly for this reason.

Perhaps the most significant observation to be made about the pre-Nauvoo concept of God held by ordinary Mormons is that it was not radically different from some other Christian perceptions, and that the newly-converted Saint probably did not need to change his image of God very much just because he had become a Mormon. There may, in fact, have been several concepts of God within the popular Mormon community.

The traditional Christian view, still held by mainline Protestant theologians, was trinitarian — that is, belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one God, indivisible in substance yet manifesting himself three different ways. By the time Mormonism arose, however, some liberal Protestant thinkers had already departed from trinitarianism, taking the ancient Arian position that Christ was distinctly separate from God. He was less than God, but more than man — he was a preexistent divine being. William Ellery Channing declared in 1815 that “there is only one person possessing supreme Divinity, even the Father,” and that the Son was sent by the Father. In 1819, in a famous ordination sermon, he made the distinction between the two persons even more clear. His definition of the nature of the Father bore no resemblance to the God Joseph Smith preached about in Nauvoo, but at least Channing and other liberal Protestants separated the persons of the Father and the Son. So

not to be trammelled. It does not prove that a man is not a good man because he errs in doctrine.”

Ibid., 5:340.


13 As quoted in ibid., pp. 479-80.

14 The sermon is reproduced in H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher, eds., American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation, with Representative Documents (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960), 1:493-502; see especially p. 496.
also, apparently, did a few evangelical Protestants of Joseph Smith’s day. One suspects that whatever creeds or dogmas remained, they were not highly emphasized to the popular audiences. Many ordinary Christians, caring little for the niceties of theology, probably thought of God and Christ as separate entities, though they may not have thought of the Father as having corporeal existence (i.e., a tangible body of flesh). Some, at least, emphasized the idea that God was a person, though in the mind of the distinguished Henry Ware this did not imply physical shape, form, or place. Rather, preached Ware, “consciousness, and the power of will and action constitute him a person.”

Converts to Mormonism in the early and mid 1830s would find little if any discomfort with the concept of God set forth in the teachings of their new religion, no matter which Christian tradition they came from. The lack of a creedal definition left them somewhat free to retain traditional views, and Mormon writings were not drastically different in tone on this issue than the teachings of other groups. Several passages in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, for instance, could be interpreted as supporting the traditional view that God and Christ were the same entity: “And he said unto me, Behold the virgin which thou seest, is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh”; “Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father”; “Yea, the Everlasting God was judged of the world”; “The Lamb of God is the Eternal Father and the Savior of the World.” These passages were modified in the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon so that they no longer seemed trinitarian, but enough remained unmodified that, without the benefit of Joseph Smith’s Nauvoo teachings or the exposition on the Father and the Son published by the First Presidency in 1916, the convert from a trinitarian tradition could find a familiar idea. Consider, for example, this passage from Mosiah:

I would that ye should understand that God himself shall come down among the Children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in the flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son — The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and the Son — And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth.

This and other passages were capable of causing doctrinal difficulties in later years, and had to be reconciled with the Mormon doctrine of God by later

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15 The sermons of Charles G. Finney, for example, show no particular concern with defining the nature of God, but his emphasis on the sonship of Christ clearly suggests that he thought of the Son as distinct from the Father. Based on a perusal of Charles G. Finney, *Sermons on Gospel Themes* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1876).

16 Henry Ware, Jr., *The Personality of Deity* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1838), p. 7. This is a printed version of a sermon preached in the chapel of Harvard University, September 23, 1888.


21 Mosiah 15:1-4. See also Alma 11:38-39, 44.
churchmen, but at least in the mid-1830s they were not likely to form a stumbling-block for converts from traditional Christianity.

At the same time, Mormon writings also lent themselves to comfortable interpretation by those who saw the Father and the Son as distinct and separate identities with a oneness of will and purpose:

And behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto them:

Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name — hear ye him.22

Many such passages are found in the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants and the Book of Moses, parts of which were published as early as 1831-32. But even when they separate the persons of the Father and the Son they do not necessarily imply that the Father is the corporeal being revealed in the story of the First Vision — or, at least, in the standard interpretations of that story. This was true also of the “Lectures on Faith,” which were not removed from the Doctrine and Covenants until 1921. The fifth lecture specifically separated the persons of the Father and the Son, though in terms that did not impute corporeality to the Father. The lecture, in fact, implied quite the opposite:

There are two personages who constitute the great, matchless, governing and supreme power over all things. . . . They are the Father and the Son; The Father being a personage of spirit, glory and power: possessing all perfection and fulness: The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle, made, or fashioned like unto man. . . . And he being the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and having overcome, received a fulness of the glory of the Father — possessing the same mind with the Father, which mind is the Holy Spirit.23

The distinction between the Father as a “personage of spirit, glory and power,” and the Son as a “personage of tabernacle” certainly suggests that the Father was not thought of as having a physical, material body. The concept of God thus presented in these lectures was not drastically different from the ideas new converts brought with them, and clearly did not lend itself to illustration by use of the First Vision. But the Mormons were being prepared for a radically unorthodox view of God that would, eventually, open the way for the First Vision to be employed as evidence.

This does not mean that some Mormons did not believe in a corporeal God — only that there was still no creedal statement to that effect and that there was room for diversity of belief. It is likely that many Mormons held an anthropomorphic view, and one anti-Mormon writer even included in his 1836 denunciation of the Saints in Kirtland a statement that they believed that “the true God is a material being, composed of body and parts.”24 But this and other ideas about

223 Nephi 11:6-7. See also verses 10-11.
24Truman Coe, "Mormonism," letter in The Ohio Observer, August 11, 1836, as reproduced by Milton V. Backman, Jr., "Truman Coe's 1836 Description of Mormonism," BYU Studies 17(Spring 1977):347-55. It is important to note that just because an anti-Mormon charged in derision that the
God had not yet found their way into the Mormon press and their profound significance was certainly not a part of the general Mormon consciousness.

One important step came in 1838, when Parley P. Pratt published one of his early defenses of Mormon doctrine. This interesting document included the first printed description in Mormon sources of an anthropomorphic, corporeal God. "We worship a God," wrote Pratt, "who has both body and parts: who has eyes, mouth and ears, and who speaks when he pleases, to whom he pleases, and sends them where he pleases." This was quickly followed by other such statements. Samuel Bennett’s 1840 defense of Mormonism decried the notion that God could not be seen by man and declared that

he hath in a multitude of instances shown himself to the children of men (chosen witnesses), in different ages of the world, and especially in these last days hath his bodily presence been manifested, and his voice hath sounded in the ear of mortal man, without consuming him.... To say that it was the similitude — figurative, metaphorical, etc., is nothing but an evasion.

The idea that God showed himself to certain chosen witnesses foreshadowed frequent Mormon statements in later years that the purpose of the First Vision was to establish a testator for his existence and nature. That same year Orson Pratt published the first printed account of the vision in Scotland and two years later three more accounts, including Joseph Smith’s, appeared in print. In 1843 Joseph Smith declared unequivocally that "the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also," and a year later he preached his most famous sermon on the doctrine of God that said, in part,

It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with Him as one man converses with another, and that He was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ Himself did.

The revolutionary implications of that statement for Mormon doctrine were tremendous, and it helped provide the framework for many additional doc-

Mormons believed in this kind of God does not prove that this is what they really believed. Coe and other anti-Mormon writers frequently made many charges that were either distorted or downright untrue.


Samuel Bennett, *A Few Remarks By Way of Reply to an Anonymous Scribbler, Calling Himself a Philanthropist: Disabusing the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of the Slanders and Falsehoods Which he has Attempted To Fasten Upon It* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking & Guilpert, Printers, 1840), p. 11.

Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.

From the famous King Follett funeral discourse, available in several places with minor variations, but most readily available in Smith, *History of the Church* 6:302-17. We can only speculate what impact either this new doctrine of God or the First Vision would have had if they had been publicly announced in the 1830s. I suspect they would have had little, if any, effect so far as conversions and loyalty to the church are concerned. When they were finally announced, most Saints were prepared to accept them along with everything else the prophet taught — their confidence in Joseph Smith simply made it natural for them to accept whatever claims he made. When one English convert first read the vision in 1840 he simply remarked in his diary that he “Felt it good.” See James B. Allen and Thomas G. Alexander, eds., *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton 1840 to 1842* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine Smith, 1974), p. 158.
trinal innovations. The 1835 teachings about God did not make such knowledge a necessity of faith, but in the 1840s it became fundamental to the faith. None of this provides any conclusive reason why Joseph Smith withheld the vision from the public eye until 1840, though another bit of curious circumstantial evidence suggests that withholding the account was so deliberate by Joseph Smith that in 1834, he actually intervened to prevent it from being printed.

The first published history of the church was in a series of letters by Oliver Cowdery printed in the *Messenger and Advocate* in 1834-35. In the third letter Cowdery told of Joseph Smith's initial quest for religious truth, including the religious revival and the young man's desire to know which church was right. The story was told in terms strikingly similar to those used by Joseph Smith in his accounts of the First Vision. Cowdery even said that it took place in the thirteenth year of Joseph's life. (In Joseph Smith's 1832 account he said his quest began when he was twelve and continued until he was fifteen, while in the 1838 account he said he was in his "fifteenth year" when the vision occurred.) Elements of both the 1832 and 1838 accounts of religious turmoil before the vision can be seen in Cowdery's letter, and he promised to continue the history in the next letter.

When the next letter was printed, however, Cowdery did not proceed with the vision story but, rather, made an amazing self-correction by asserting that he had made a mistake on the date of the revival. It should have been the seventeenth year of Joseph's life, he said, "which would bring the date down to the year 1823." Then, without further reference to the religious excitement, he proceeded with the account of the visitation of Moroni. One of two things had happened. Either Oliver Cowdery had made an honest mistake in dating or, upon reflection or instruction, he had decided it inappropriate to tell the story of the vision and simply used this device to get on to the next important episode. What argues convincingly for the possibility that he originally intended to recount the vision is that the third letter contains material remarkably similar to Joseph Smith's own written introductions to that sacred event. Could it be that Joseph had his personal reasons for not wanting the story circulated at the time, and so simply instructed Oliver Cowdery not to print it? We will never know, but in light of what has been said earlier such a conclusion seems logical. Joseph finally decided to publish it himself, he wrote in 1838, in order to "disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts."

It is worth noting that Joseph Smith himself never used the First Vision to

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29 Cowdery letters published in *Messenger and Advocate*, December 1834 and February 1835. There are some additional problems in these accounts that could provide different kinds of speculation. In the first printing of the December 1834 issue, the dating we have identified above as thirteenth year was actually obscured in printing. It was set in roman numerals, but the "13" cannot clearly be made out. When the paper was reprinted in 1840, however, it was spelled out as "thirteenth." However, in the next letter Cowdery said that he identified the time as the 15th year of Joseph's age, and it should have been 17th. Another problem lies in the identifying of the religious reformation with the visit of a certain Reverend Lane to the area. The evidence for when this minister actually visited that vicinity is obscure. Richard L. Anderson discusses the problem of these letters in detail in his "Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision."

30 Joseph Smith 2:1.
illustrate his own expanded teachings about God. It appears, in fact, that he seldom referred to it at all, except in private conversation, even after it was published. But the fact that it was published provided a ready tool that his followers would later use in every conceivable way to teach about the God that he defined for them in Nauvoo. With the opportunity finally there, it may seem surprising that more Mormon writers did not rush in with enthusiasm between 1840 and 1880 to use the vision as a proof-text for Mormon doctrine. But they did not. Only a few, in fact, referred to it at all during this forty years.

One reason may have been that the first generation of Mormon theologians placed so much emphasis on the idea that the restoration of the gospel began when the angel Moroni delivered the Book of Mormon. This event, after all, was depicted from the beginning as fulfilling the prophecy in Revelation 14:6, where John declared: “And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth.” Even Orson Pratt, who first published the vision in 1840 and was one of the most meticulous of the early church leaders in his effort to systematize doctrine, continued to emphasize the idea that the restoration was inaugurated by the angel. In an 1848 tract he asked the question “In what manner does Joseph Smith declare that a dispensation of the gospel was committed unto him?” His answer was that Joseph Smith testified of the visit of an angel of God and that this claim was in fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

Though Mr. Smith had taught a perfect doctrine, yet if he had testified that this doctrine was not restored by an angel, all would at once have known him to be an imposter. . . . John testifies that when the everlasting gospel is restored to the earth it shall be by an angel. Mr. Smith testifies that it was restored by an angel, and in no other way. This is another presumptive evidence that he was sent of God. 31

Since much, if not most, of this early doctrinal material was published in works intended for non-Mormon consumption, it may be that the emphasis continued to be placed on the angel and the Book of Mormon because that fulfilled biblical prophecy, while the First Vision took a back seat in the literature only because it did not fulfill the prophecy.

There were exceptions, but they were in literature designed more specifically for the Saints. In 1849 Orson Pratt referred briefly to the vision in a Millennial Star article to demonstrate that the Father and the Son were two distinct persons — the first such doctrinal use we have discovered so far. 32 Then, in 1851, Willard Richards published the Pearl of Great Price that contained, as he said, several items that had been published earlier but, due to limited circulation of church journals, were “comparatively unknown at present.” Among these was Joseph Smith’s 1838 account of the First Vision, and it is significant that the publication was intended specifically for believers and not, the editor said, “as a pioneer of faith among unbelievers.” But though the vision was becoming more widely known among the Saints, its use would still be limited. Even Key to the Science of Theology, published by Orson Pratt’s brother

31 Orson Pratt, Divine Authority or the Question, Was Joseph Smith Sent of God? (Liverpool: R. James, 1848), p. 4.
32 Millennial Star, October 15, 1849, p. 310.
Parley in 1855, completely ignored the vision in its extensive treatment of the Godhead. When Willard Richards published his *Compendium of the Faith and Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* in 1857, he also failed to use the vision as a proof text for the nature of God. He used it only as an illustration in his section on the “Names, Titles and Characters” given to Jesus.

The major use made of the vision over the next several years was simply to illustrate, for the benefit of the Saints, the initial historic authority and calling of Joseph Smith. This is the way the founding prophet himself used his theophany, and this was the use that continued until after the death of Brigham Young. Orson Pratt was the major purveyor of the story, but even he did not enlarge upon it for any great doctrinal purposes.33

Then, in the 1880s appeared a second generation of church writers and theologians. When Orson Pratt died in 1881 only two general authorities remained alive and in the church who had been ordained to office during the lifetime of Joseph Smith: John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff. Many Saints remained alive who had known the prophet, but there were more in the church who had never seen him, including many second and third generation Mormons. These people, moreover, were going through a period of intensive religious crisis, as new federal laws stepped up antipolygamy prosecution and seemed to challenge the very existence of the church. The time was ready-made for the outpouring of a new identity with the founding prophet — new reminders to the Saints of what their heritage really was, and of what Joseph Smith’s testimony really meant to them personally. The First Vision was a natural tool for such a purpose, and a new generation of writers could hardly fail to use it.

Beautifully symbolic of this new direction was the fact that it seemed to begin with art and music — certainly among the most effective means of popularizing an idea. In 1869, C. C. A. Christensen, a Danish convert and immigrant to Utah, began to paint significant incidents from Mormon history onto large canvases. In 1878 he sewed together the first group of eight paintings, rolled them on a long wooden pole and began touring Utah giving illustrated lectures on the history of the church. Among these was a painting of the First Vision, and among those who listened to the artist was young George Manwaring, who eventually became the author of several well-known Mormons hymns. Manwaring was inspired by the painting, and it was not long before he wrote “Joseph Smith’s First Prayer.” Set to music composed by Adam Craik Smith, it appeared in the *Deseret Sunday School Union Music Book* in 1884.

33Few books were published for the benefit of the Saints during this time, so the Journal of Discourses becomes our major guide to the period. At least one small book compiled for non-Mormons reproduced the Wentworth letter, which told of the vision. See George A. Smith, *The Rise, Progress and Travels of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Office, 1869).

34In one case he told the story and then used it to demonstrate the idea that God imparts knowledge only according to individual readiness and capacity, and in another he used it as proof of Joseph Smith’s honesty, but there was no doctrinal elaboration of the kind seen so frequently in the church today. *Journal of Discourses* 12:355; 14:261-62.

and ever since has been one of Mormonism's most well-loved hymns.\(^{36}\) The title was later changed to “Oh, How Lovely Was the Morning.” It was thus four decades after the organization of the church that the vision found its way into artistic media, but it was largely through these media that it eventually found its way into the hearts and minds of the Saints.

The printed word and public sermons, meanwhile, began to play an increasingly significant role. George Q. Cannon was a sort of transition figure between first and second generation writers, and as early as 1880 he suggested that the vision could be used to teach children about the nature of their Creator.\(^{37}\) In 1883 he gave one of the first sermons to expand upon the Vision by using it to demonstrate the need to restore a true knowledge of God. This, his sermon implied, was in fact the major purpose for the vision, and therein Cannon formulated the essential approach to the meaning of the vision that would be used in the church for at least the next 100 years. “The first that we knew concerning God,” he said, “was through the testimony of the Prophet Joseph. Even the personality of God was doubted.” He then stated what has become a standard Mormon perception of the world’s view of God; “that His center was nowhere, and His circumference was everywhere:...even ministers of religion could not conceive of the true idea.” This led to his announcement of the grand purpose of the vision:

But all this was swept away in one moment by the appearance of the Almighty Himself — by the appearance of God, the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ, to the boy Joseph:... In one moment all this darkness disappeared, and once more there was a man found on the earth, embodied in the flesh, who had seen God, who had seen Jesus, and who could describe the personality of both. Faith was again restored to the earth, the true faith and the true knowledge concerning our Creator:... This revelation dissipated all misconceptions and all false ideas, and removed the uncertainty that had existed respecting these matters. The Father came accompanied by the Son, thus showing that there were two personages of the Godhead, two presiding personages whom we worship and to whom we look, the one the Father and the other the Son. Joseph saw that the Father had a form; that He had a head; that He had arms; that He had limbs; that He had feet; that He had a face and a tongue with which to express His thoughts; for He said unto Joseph: “This is my beloved Son” — pointing to the Son — “hear Him.”

Now, it was meant that this knowledge should be restored first of all. It seems so, at least, from the fact that God Himself came; it seems that the knowledge had to be restored as the basis for all true faith to be built upon. There can be no faith that is not built upon a true conception of God our Father. Therefore, before even angels came, He came himself, accompanied by His Son, and revealed Himself once more to man upon the earth.\(^{38}\)

The metamorphosis was complete: from the vision experience itself in 1820, to Joseph Smith’s decision not to publicize it, through the 1830s when the Saints knew little or nothing about it, through the 1840s when the vision was told and Joseph Smith’s expanded concept of God was made known to the


\(^{37}\)Editorial in *Juvenile Instructor*, July 15, 1880, p. 162.

\(^{38}\) *Journal of Discourses* 24:371-72.
Saints, through a generation when it was used primarily to establish Joseph Smith's prophetic authority, to the beginning of a period in which both the new concept of God and the vision would be considered central to the faith.

In a way, George Q. Cannon was a logical person to complete that metamorphosis. Converted in England in 1840, he migrated to Nauvoo in 1843 and was therefore acquainted with Joseph Smith for only a year before the prophet's death. The First Vision had just become a part of Mormon literature when Cannon was converted, and he probably was not fully sensitive to the fact that Saints for at least a decade had exercised faith without knowing of either the new definition of Deity or the vision that illustrated it. He became an apostle, a member of the First Presidency of the church, superintendent of the Sunday School, and editor of the *Juvenile Instructor*, all of which put him in a position of authority capable of exercising important influence on Mormon thought.

Cannon and others continued to use the First Vision for its new didactic purposes, and this seemed to open the door for seeing in its proofs or demonstrations of multitudinous other ideas. Cannon even saw it as proof that Darwin was wrong. Every Latter-day Saint, he said, must believe the concept of God taught by Joseph's vision and "if this is so, where is there room found for believing in Darwin's theory?" 39

From there the story of the First Vision as a fundamental theme in the presentation of Mormon doctrine only expanded upon the pattern established by the artists, preachers, and writers of the 1880s. Brigham H. Roberts, the first important systematizer of Mormon thought after the death of the Pratts, helped standardize the approach in print by augmenting what Cannon had begun. In his *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History* (1893) Roberts listed five reasons why the vision was of "vast importance": (1) it revealed that God had "both body and parts, that he was in the form of a man, or, rather, that man had been made in his image"; (2) it proved that the Father and the Son are distinct persons and that the oneness of the Godhead spoken of in the scriptures is a oneness of purposes; (3) "it swept away the rubbish of human dogma and tradition" by announcing that none of the churches of Joseph's day were acknowledged by God; (4) it showed, contrary to the claims of the Christian world, that revelation had not ceased; and (5) it created a witness for God on the earth, thus laying the foundation for faith. 40 These themes were repeated in later writings by Roberts, 41 and eventually became the standard for church lesson manuals and other publications. "There is nothing in our doctrine of Deity today — but what

39 *Juvenile Instructor*, June 15, 1883, p. 191.
40 B. H. Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1893), pp. 307-8. In a footnote on page 307 Roberts seemed to anticipate the objection that even though Joseph said he saw two persons, he did not necessarily describe God in the way Mormons do and therefore this is not proof that God is like man. Argued Roberts: "While the Prophet Joseph in describing this first great vision refers to the Lord and His Son Jesus Christ as two glorious personages without giving at that time any particular description of their persons, it is clear that they were in the form of men." Roberts then quoted the King Follett funeral discourse to prove the doctrine further.
41 See, for example, B. H. Roberts *A New Witness for God* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1895), pp. 171-74.
was germinally present in that first great revelation," Roberts declared in 1903; and the new way of using the vision would amply demonstrate this.

The vision and its attendant uses quickly began to appear in lesson manuals, augmenting the Mormon awareness of its transcendant importance. In 1899 the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association used it to demonstrate that it had ushered in the "Dispensation of the Fulness of Times." The vision was thus replacing the angel in Mormon thought as the implementing factor in the restoration. Nephi Anderson's history of the church for young people (1900) used the vision in exactly the same way as Roberts's Ecclesiastical History. When the first priesthood manuals were printed in 1909, the priests, elders, and high priests all had lessons on the vision. In these and other manuals it was used specifically to teach certain doctrinal concepts of God as well as give the Saints important spiritual direction. A history written by John Henry Evans in 1905, and used extensively by the Sunday School, declared that the vision "will some day be generally regarded as the most important event in the history of the world, excepting only the revelation of Godhood in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ." The vision was thus formulating not only historical perceptions but prophetic images as well.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the First Vision also took a permanent place in the missionary literature of the church. It had been there before, beginning with Orson Pratt's Remarkable Visions in 1840, but somewhere around 1910 the pamphlet "Joseph Smith Tells His Own Story" was published as a separate tract, and it has remained in print ever since as one of the church's major missionary tools.

There were other things happening that would enhance the vision in the Mormon mind. More artistic representations, as Richard Oman has shown, were emerging. The Sacred Grove was acquired by the church in this period, and pilgrimages to the grove became sacred experiences for many Mormons. No one knew the spot where the vision occurred — or even if the trees left standing when the grove was purchased were in the same part of the original grove where Joseph went to pray — but none of that was really important. The grove became the visible symbol of the theophany that inaugurated the restoration of all things, and from it the visiting Saints would gain spiritual sustenance and greater faith in the reality of the vision itself.
In 1920, the centennial anniversary of the vision, the celebration was a far cry from the almost total lack of reference to it just fifty years earlier. The Mutual Improvement Associations issued a special commemorative pamphlet, the vision was memorialized in music, verse and dramatic representations, and the church's official publication, the Improvement Era, devoted almost the entire April issue to that event. The new emphasis was a fitting symbol of what had happened.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, belief in the First Vision was fundamental to the faith of the Latter-day Saints. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., a member of the First Presidency, probably captured best its expanded meaning for the Saints when he told religious educators in 1938 that the second of two essentials to which Mormon teachers must "give full faith" was "that the Father and the Son actually and in truth and very deed appeared to the Prophet Joseph in a vision in the woods," together with all that this and the other visions and revelations Joseph Smith received implied. The reality of the vision was at the center of the whole concept of the restoration, and, declared President Clark, "No teacher who does not have a real testimony... of the divine mission of Joseph Smith — including in all its reality the First Vision — has any place in the Church school system." When another general authority declared in 1973 that "the First Vision is the very foundation of this Church, and it is my conviction that each member of this Church performs his duty in direct relation to his personal testimony and faith in the First Vision," he was only reflecting the culmination of the emergence of the vision as a Mormon fundamental.

As they began to use Joseph Smith's first religious experience for various instructional purposes, Mormon teachers and writers were also creating certain secondary but highly significant historical perceptions in the minds of the Latter-day Saints. There was no intent to distort or mislead, but what happened was only one example of a very natural intellectual process that helps explain the emergence of at least some basic community perceptions. It seems to be a truism that whenever great events take place, second and third generation expounders tend to build a kind of mythology around them by presuming corollary historical interpretations that often have little basis in fact. In this case the deepening awareness of the vision, along with a growing community sensitivity for how essential it was to Mormon faith and doctrine, created an atmosphere in which other historical inferences easily could be drawn. These included the ideas that (1) over the centuries considerable "rubbish concerning religion" had accumulated that only revelation could correct; (2) most, if not all, Christians believed in the traditional trinitarian concept of God; (3) the Christian world denied the concept of continuing revelation; (4) Joseph Smith

48 General Boards of the Mutual Improvement Associations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *In Commemoration of the Divine Ushering in of the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times through Joseph Smith, the Prophet, In the Spring of 1820* (1920).

49 J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *The Charted Course of the Church in Education* (Address delivered at Brigham Young University Summer School in Aspen Grove, August 8, 1938), pp. 3, 7. The first of the two essential principles concerned the atonement of Christ and all its implications.

told the story of his vision widely, and (5) he continued to be persecuted or
publicly ridiculed for it, even to the time of his death. Such historical inter-
pretation, much of it misleading, soon dominated popular Mormon thought.
The challenge for individual believers, including Mormon historians, would be
to separate the essential truths of the vision experience from corollaries that
may not be so essential to the faith.

Once the vision assumed its predominant place in Mormon writing and
preaching, it became much more than Joseph Smith’s personal experience. It
became a shared community experience. Every Mormon and every prospective
convert was urged to pray for his own testimony of its reality — in effect, to seek
his own theophany by becoming one with Joseph in the grove. Latter-day Saints
did not forget the importance of the angel Moroni, but gradually the First
Vision took precedence over the visit of the angel as the event that ushered in
the restoration of the Gospel. It was only a short step from there to the
expanded use of the vision as a teaching device whenever the doctrine of God
or the principle of revelation played any part. As the years passed, the list of
lessons, truths, principles, and historical interpretations taught or illustrated
by the vision grew longer. Each writer or preacher saw it as fundamental, but
each also had his own private insight into what it could illustrate or portray.
Only a partial list of what people have said since 1880 that the First Vision
teaches, how it may be used, or why it is significant would include at least the
following:

1. The Father and the Son are two distinct “personages alike in form,
   substance, and glory,” God the Father has a physical body, with all the
   parts possessed by man, and the Father and the Son look exactly alike.51

2. Joseph Smith had priesthood authority when he had his vision, for no
   man can see the face of the Father and live unless he has the priesthood.
   He had received this priesthood before the world was made.52

3. The traditions of men respecting God were false, but “all this was swept
   away in one moment” by the appearance of the Father and the Son and
   “faith was again restored to the earth, the true faith and the true knowl-
   edge concerning our Creator.” The world has thus profited as vagueness,
   doubt, and uncertainty have been eliminated.53

4. Joseph Smith “startled the world. It stood aghast at the statement he made
   and the testimony which he bore” of having seen God.54

5. Since a true knowledge of God did not exist in 1820, the purpose of the
   vision was so that God “might have a testator upon the earth.”55

6. Through the testimony of the testator, people would be educated in a
   correct manner so that they would “cease to worship the bodiless, innately-

51George Q. Cannon in Juvenile Instructor, July 15, 1880, p. 162, and in Journal of Discourses
24:341 (October 7, 1883), and 24:372 (September 2, 1883).
54George Q. Cannon in ibid., 24:341. See also Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine (Salt Lake
City: Bookcraft, 1958), p. 286, where this general authority states that Joseph’s account of the vision
rocked “the whole religious foundation of the Christian world.”
rrial, unnatural, nonentity, and be turned to the worship of the living — and true God."

7. Revelation had not ceased, or, as some writers put it, "the Heavens were no longer brass." 

8. The vision is evidence of God's existence (i.e., not just proof of his personality).

9. The vision ushered in the Dispensation of the Fulness of Times.

10. It impeded the progress of Satan.

11. Joseph Smith learned that God and Christ sympathized with him and loved him. By implication, this meant they loved all the rest of God's children, too.

12. The vision was the greatest declaration Joseph Smith ever made to the world.

13. As a result of the vision, there lived in 1820 "one person who knew that the word of the Creator, 'Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness,' had a meaning more than in metaphor."

14. "It shows that the Son is appointed by the Father to direct in the affairs of this world."

15. It shows that God grants blessings to those who seek.

16. God answers prayers in ways often unlooked for.

17. The vision opened the way for the dead as well as the living to hear the gospel.

18. The fact of the great apostasy was first announced in this vision.

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56 Juvenile Instructor, November 1, 1884, p. 330.
57 George Q. Cannon, The Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), p. 37. This phrase was picked up by Joseph Fielding Smith in Essentials in Church History (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1922), p. 41.
59 See note 43. One orator grew highly elaborate on this point: "The vision was indeed the earthquake which dried up the rivers of unbelief, which started the fountains of truth and which shook the mountain from whose side the little stone rolled forth to accomplish its destiny of filling the whole earth with the Gospel of purity." Alma O. Taylor, "The First Vision. An Address Delivered at the Speakers' Contest, Y.M.M.I.A., Salt Lake Stake of Zion," Improvement Era (July 1900), p. 686.
60 Ibid.
61 George Q. Cannon, The Latter-day Prophet. History of Joseph Smith Written for Young People (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1900), p. 16.
64 General Authorities of the Church, Priest's Quorum Course of Study (1909), p. 27.
65 General Authorities of the Church, High Priest Course of Study (1909), p. 45.
67 General Authorities of the Church, Divine Mission of the Savior, Priest's Quorum Course of Study for 1910 (Salt Lake City, 1910), p. 90.
68 Osborne J. P. Widtsoe, The Restoration (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1912), p. 18. Here, incidentally, is another case where enthusiasm for the messages of the vision created at least some historical misperceptions. The idea that there had been an apostasy from the ancient church of Christ was very prevalent in Joseph Smith's day, even before the vision.
19. It established "the fact that God can and will speak to man, whenever He chooses so to do, in any age."  

20. Satan is always ready to stop the Lord’s work.  

21. God has almost invariably selected young boys for his special messengers, and the vision holds true to this pattern.  

22. Joseph Smith’s prayer in the grove was "the first real faith cry that had gone up from this cold, superstitious world since the dense darkness of the middle ages had driven truth from the altar and living belief from the human heart. It marked the beginning of an epoch. It was the beginning of the real modern spiritual renaissance."  

23. "When this boy walked out of that sacred grove, that day, he was greater than the most learned theologians and profoundest philosophers."  

24. The vision was at once the most complete revelation of the powers of both heaven and hell.  

25. The vision is evidence of Joseph Smith’s divine mission.  

26. The church is a necessary result of the vision.  

27. The vision is evidence for the resurrection.  

28. Knowledge gained from the vision is saving knowledge for mankind. 

In 1980 the children of the Primary organization presented a special sesquicentennial program in every ward and branch of the church. Here was a perfect example of how deeply the First Vision had become rooted in the conscience of the Mormon community. The theme of the presentation was, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God" — the quotation from James 1:5 that led Joseph Smith to the grove 160 years before. The program portrayed a father and a mother talking to their children about the restoration of the gospel, and the first event discussed was Joseph Smith’s First Vision. As the mother told of Joseph going into the grove, a children’s chorus sang "Oh, How Lovely was the Morning." As the story progressed, the father asked, "What great truths about our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ did Joseph Smith learn from this divine appearance?" The answers, coming from three different children, were: "He learned that God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, are

69Ibid.  
70General Authorities of the Church, The Latter-day Prophet, Course of Study for Deacons, 1918 (Salt Lake City, 1918), p. 16.  
73Ibid.  
74Melvin J. Ballard, “One Hundred Years Ago,” Improvement Era 23(June 1920):693.  
two separate beings....Joseph got to see what Heavenly Father and Jesus really looked like....Joseph learned that our heavenly Father hears and answers our prayers."

George Q. Cannon's merest suggestion in 1880 that the vision could be used to teach certain truths to children was more than fulfilled in the next hundred years. The vision was no longer just Joseph Smith's personal experience, nor was it rehearsed simply to establish the initial prophetic authority of the founder of the church. In the twentieth century it became a shared community experience — one that every Mormon must respond to personally, and one that every teacher could use appropriately to verify a multitude of doctrines and historical concepts. It was, indeed, not just Joseph Smith's theophany, but the Great Mormon Theophany.

79 If Any of You Lack Wisdom, Let Him Ask of God, 1980 Children's Sacrament Meeting Presentation (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978), pp. 4-6.
MORMON HISTORY ASSOCIATION
ENDOWMENT FUND

The Mormon History Association invites contributions to a special Endowment Fund established in 1979 to further the Association’s goal of promoting the understanding of Mormon history and scholarly research and publication in the field. Tax-deductible donations to the fund will be invested in a trust fund established at Zion’s First National Bank in Salt Lake City. Interest from the account will help defray publication costs of the Journal of Mormon History.

For further information, contact members of the Investment and Finance Committee: E. Gordon Gee (chairman), James B. Allen, Jay E. Brandt, James Everett, and William B. Smart.
One of the experiences looming large in Mormon consciousness during most of the nineteenth century was that of persecution. The members of this new religion were driven from Ohio, from Missouri, and finally from Illinois into the wilderness and eventual settlement in the Great Basin. Mobbings, lynchings, burnings, and general hatred were what the Mormons were conditioned to expect from their neighbors.¹

But there was another side to the picture; acts of generosity and altruism did occur on different occasions. In Missouri there had been some sympathy for the plight of the Mormons, some efforts to relocate them within the state, and, after their forcible expulsion in 1838-39, some efforts to compensate them for their losses.² In Illinois there were manifestations of sympathy as the Mormon refugees were taken into homes at Quincy and elsewhere.³ One diligent fund-raiser in 1839 was John P. Greene, who published a pamphlet,

¹An effort to account for the persecution experienced by the Mormons is found in Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints (New York: Knopf, 1979), chap. 3.


³B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Published by the Church, 1930), 2:3-6.
traveled through various cities, held public meetings, enlisted editorial support from the newspapers, and collected donations.\(^1\)

The dramatic exodus of the Mormons from their city of Nauvoo started in February 1846, earlier than had been expected. Crossing the Mississippi River on the ice, the Mormon wagons moved on to the camp at Sugar Creek. Later there was a settlement established at Mount Pisgah. As the refugees continued to pour across the river — by ferry after the ice melted — they filled the roads and set up dozens of temporary camps all along the way from Nauvoo to Council Bluffs. Some were prepared with adequate provisions, but many were not.\(^5\) In the summer and fall of 1846 Colonel Thomas L. Kane, son of Judge John Kane of Philadelphia, visited the Mormon refugees and was moved by the suffering of an afflicted, starving, exposed, often sick people. He himself contracted the "fever" and was tenderly nursed back to health by his Mormon hosts. During his visit, in September 1846, the few hundred Mormons still left in Nauvoo, trying to muster resources for the trip or to sell their property, were driven out in the so-called Battle of Nauvoo. "Like the wounded birds of a flock fired into towards nightfall," Kane later wrote, "they came straggling on with faltering steps, many of them without bag or baggage, beast or barrow, all asking shelter or burial, and forcing a fresh repartition of the already divided rations of their friends."\(^6\) Kane returned to his home in Philadelphia determined to help the Mormons. The immediate task, as he recognized, was to help change public opinion and to raise emergency relief.\(^7\)

Meanwhile, the Mormons themselves bent every effort to obtain support from both church members and the larger community. Untiring in their efforts, they obtained what they could. Starting slowly in 1846, the fund-raising efforts gained momentum through 1847, and reached a peak in the Washington and Philadelphia campaigns of 1848. By 1849, both the desperate need for emergency assistance and the forthcoming aid diminished. The campaign tells something about public opinion towards the Mormons in the late 1840s and about the methods and limitations of American philanthropy at the time.

As early as the summer of 1846 the suffering of the Mormons was becoming known. The St. Louis American reported on July 23 that "the whole body of Mormons are represented as in a very destitute condition — not only without

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\(^1\)The Liberty Hall and Cincinnati Gazette, June 19, 1839; the New York American, September 11 and 17, 1839. I am indebted to George L. Mitton for information about these activities of his ancestor, John P. Greene. Other documents and newspaper extracts, describing efforts to obtain relief in 1839, are reprinted in Parley P. Pratt, ed., Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1938), chap. 35.

\(^2\)Roberts, Comprehensive History, 3:40-54.

\(^3\)Thomas L. Kane, The Mormons (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1850), p. 54.

\(^4\)On December 2, 1846, Kane wrote to Brigham Young that he found it "next to impossible to do anything for you before public opinion was corrected." Albert L. Zobell, Jr., "Thomas L. Kane, Ambassador to the Mormons" (M.S. thesis, University of Utah, 1944). Later he told of enlisting the aid of the editors of several newspapers. Journal History of the Church, December 31, 1846, Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, hereinafter cited Church Archives. (The Journal History is a mammoth compilation of typed and clipped primary sources.)

\(^5\)"It can hardly fail that many of these persons, especially the aged and sick, women and children, must perish during the next fall and winter." St. Louis American, July 23, 1846.
food, but in want of shoes and clothing."8 A Major Holton was sent to distribute clothing and provisions "among the destitutes on the opposite side of the river," and Mayor John Wood of Quincy personally supervised the distribution of supplies to the "suffering creatures" at Montrose.9 About the same time, Joseph Heywood, one of the trustees left to dispose of Mormon property in Nauvoo, went to St. Louis, where Mayor Peter G. Camden issued an appeal for "food, clothing, or anything else, that the benevolent may choose to send to the sufferers."10 The result was apparently only about three hundred dollars worth of assistance.11 These early efforts were doubtless of some help in relieving suffering, but they fell far short of the need. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1847 the Mormon leaders attempted to enlarge the campaign.

On July 12, 1847, Charles R. Dana left the temporary Mormon camp at Mount Pisgah on a special mission to the East "for the purpose of gathering means for the removal of the Saints at Pisgah to a place of refuge."12 All along the way, in almost every town, village, and inn, he attempted to collect money. At St. Louis he was able to collect some money and some clothing from Mormons there. At Cincinnati he called on the mayor, who expressed sympathy and went with him to the publisher of the Daily Atlas and publishers of eight other newspapers, all of whom agreed to run an article. He got letters of recommendation from friends or members. One of them obtained an interview with a millionaire named Longworth, who wrote out a check for ten dollars. Then Dana went around the square soliciting and came up with seventy-five cents. It was "uphill business."

As the journey continued, Dana went to places where friends or relatives of Mormons were known to live. On the boat to Cleveland Dana got permission from the captain to give a lecture. He passed the hat and collected $1.85. Stopping briefly at New York City, he was advised that there was a better chance of "striking a vein" at Philadelphia and that such success would mean "almost unbounded influence" in New York. So on he went to Philadelphia. Within a few days an interview was held with Colonel Thomas L. Kane, who took "the responsibility of laying our claims before the public, also making his office a place of Deposit and of appealing to his personal friends." Kane promised to devote his energy during the fall and winter to the task of "gathering means."

It was decided that success in Philadelphia was crucial to success elsewhere; apparently only here did the Saints have strong gentile friends. But the local election was underway. Only after the Philadelphia mayor had been reelected, in the second week of October, would the way be clear to pursue the solicitation

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8Quincy (Ill.) Whig, September 30, October 14 and 28, 1846.
9St. Louis American, September 30, 1846. The same appeal, entitled "The Mormon Sufferers," appeared in the St. Louis Weekly American, October 9, 1846.
10About 300 dollars in provisions was raised in St. Louis for the Mormons. We expected that as many thousands would have been raised in that city from the tone of the Organ." Quincy Whig, October 28, 1846.
12Charles Root Dana Diary, July 12, 1847, microfilm of holograph, Church Archives. The details of Dana's activities described above are taken from his diary unless otherwise indicated. A traveling companion of Dana's who was also active in fund raising was Robert Campbell, but unfortunately I have found no diary or other source recording the details.
campaign. This slow-down was somewhat discouraging, but the colonel reassured Dana and his friends that they should have “one or two thousand dollars this fall to relieve us in our present distress.”

While waiting for the intervening five weeks or so to pass, Dana decided to visit other cities “in the South or some place where it will not reflect any bad influence upon this place.” So he went to Wilmington, Delaware. ("I took up a collection of 74 cents from the charitable citizens of Wilmington.") He called upon friends or members of the church, many of whom came up with small donations — a couple of dollars here, a pair of socks there.

Recognizing the need for a letter of recommendation, Dana returned to Philadelphia and had prepared a set of credentials that included clippings from two newspapers, presumably describing the suffering among the Saints, and a letter from Colonel Kane, all stamped with the official city seal and certified by the city recorder. Then, probably using Kane’s letter as a means of gaining entry, Dana went to Chester and obtained permission to use the school house for a public meeting. He put up notices and at the designated time went there. He “found a parcel of rude boys and young men constantly hooting and blowing out the lights throwing down the candles and breaking them and no person to control them. I waited a reasonable time for the people to come together, but none came. Believing that it was useless to attempt to Lecture in that place I returned to my lodgings.” Before leaving town he was able to collect, from the cashier of the bank, a grand total of one dollar.

Going to Baltimore, Dana called on several prominent men, including the mayor, the president of the city council, a prominent Presbyterian, and a representative of the Society of Friends, none of whom gave him anything but argument. “Before I was through they got enough of that,” he wrote. The one fairly generous donor was William McCaulley, “an infidel,” who came up with two dollars, a book, and some clothing.

Much of Dana’s time was spent in going from door to door. Usually he would get a few dollars cash, a few articles of clothing, and occasionally other items such as medicine. Still, it was discouraging. “In soliciting aid from door to door,” he said, “I address myself to many persons that had rather give me kicks than coppers, and say that the sooner we are out of existence the better for us.” One man said, “Are you begging? Are you begging? Begone.” Poor Dana. “This is enough,” he wrote, “to make one almost forget his prayers.”

On September 30 Dana went to Washington, D.C., where the tide started to turn. As he later recalled the circumstances of his arrival, Dana was approached by several porters but, moved upon by the Spirit, declined their services until one came along who told him about the boarding house of a Mrs. Reed, whose husband was an important government functionary. More important, Mr. Reed’s father-in-law was General Duff Green, a former member of Jackson’s “Kitchen Cabinet,” experienced diplomat, and generally much respected in Washington society.\(^\text{13}\) Long interested in the future of the South and

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\(^{13}\) Dictionary of American Biography, 22 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1928-1944), s.v. “Duff Green.” That Green’s motivation may not have been entirely disinterested is suggested by the proposal he sent via Dana to Brigham Young that the Mormons settle in Santo Domingo, where Green had invested in land. Holograph memorandum, dated November 2, 1847, Church Archives; reprinted in Brigham Young University Studies 15 (Autumn 1974): 105-9.
the West, Green took a strong interest in the cause of the Mormons. He introduced Dana to the secretary of the Navy, the commissioner general of the Army, the chief clerk of the War Department, and the secretary of war, all of whom were kind and sympathetic. A newspaper editor named Riddle said that General Green was "perfect master of the pen, and that he would lend his bow for the General's arrow."

Green introduced Dana to a Baptist preacher, to a prominent lady from New Orleans, and to a man who had been solicitor of the General Land Office and now was a writer for the *Whig*. "In a word all sects and parties are bound to listen to Genl Green," Dana noted in his diary. A sign of Green's influence was his success in enlisting the endorsement of several prominent Washington clergymen — the pastors of the First Presbyterian Church, St. John's Church, Wesley Chapel, Baptist Church, Trinity Church, and others — who signed a letter of recommendation:

Having examined the papers presented by Mr. Dana, and convinced that without adverting to the religious faith of this people, their case is one of almost unparalleled hardship and persecution, we heartily commend the application of Mr. Dana to every benevolent and Christian mind.

Smith Pyne, rector of St. John's, gave ten dollars in addition to his signature.

Due to poor health and the press of Mexican War developments, President Polk had not yet been able to receive Dana. Accordingly, General Green wrote the following letter to the president:

Dear Sir.

A party of Mormons driven from their homes by the mob of Illinois, being compelled to leave the greater part of their property and effects behind them, were unable to proceed beyond the headwaters of Grand River, where they made a temporary residence. Destitute of the necessaries of life and without means to purchase them, they must perish, unless they obtain relief from some source.

They have deputed two of their number to make an appeal in their name to the people of the United States, one of whom Mr. Charles R. Dana is now in this City, and encouraged by your permitting a body of his people to enter the service of the United States desirous to thank you for what you have done, and to ascertain whether you can give them further aid. He requests me to ask of you the favor of a personal interview and that you will name an hour when he may call upon you.

Your obe't Sev't.

DUFF GREEN

It was a time of good feelings. In attending a Baptist service on Sunday, Dana listened with respect to the minister, who was "a very honest man but [he] dont know much about the gospel."

Newspaper editors were especially cooperative in their willingness to publish the letter signed by the clergymen and also articles prepared by Duff Green. The *Daily National Intelligencer*, the *Daily National Whig*, and the *Union* were some of the papers whose editors agreed "to help all they can." William Seaton, editor of the *National Intelligencer* and also mayor of Washington, wondered what sort of a delusion it was that the Mormons had been captivated by. "You talk like a rational man," he said to Dana. "I would like to know more about it...." He did not have time just then to hear more, but he was willing to help in the campaign to raise money.
Green was anxious to use the good offices not only of government officials, clergy, and newspapers, but also other private organizations. On October 5 Green and Dana attended a meeting of the Sons of Temperance. After they had listened to two "very tedious" speeches, Green told of the persecution of the Mormons and the purpose of Dana's mission. A motion was made, seconded, and passed that a committee be appointed "to assist me in canvassing the city."

It was about this time that the idea of a public meeting was proposed by the Reverend R. R. Gurley, a Washington clergyman. The idea was discussed in a small meeting by the Reverend Mr. Gurley, General Green, Mayor Seaton, and Dana. The mayor "cheerfully consented to preside" at the public meeting, but made two specific requests to guarantee success. Dana was to see General Walter Jones and ask him to attend the meeting, speak, and offer some resolutions. An eminent Washington attorney since early in the century, Jones had supervised the quelling of the Washington riots in 1835. The mayor also wanted Dana to call on more members of the clergy and arrange for their names to be used in the advance publicity. Both of these missions were accomplished. By getting all the "right people" lined up in support of this cause Dana and his friends were hoping to create a "snowball" effect.

Due to bad weather, the public meeting on October 12 was only "thinly" attended. Nevertheless, the group was organized and speeches were given by the mayor, Dana, the Reverend Mr. Gurley, and General Green. Dana's speech was brief but poignant. Dana acknowledged the temporary relief provided by the "charitable and philanthropic citizens of Quincy." In the summer and fall of 1846 came a "desolating sickness" which had killed many. The Mormon refugees were "almost naked, and destitute of the necessary clothing to screen them from the inclemency of the weather and the vicissitudes of a changing climate." Dana concluded:

Thus situated, gentlemen, we are compelled to look back to the land of our adoption and the land which gave us birth, and humbly and most earnestly appeal to your sympathies, your magnanimity, and your benevolence; and, knowing that your generous hands have been outstretched to foreign countries suffering from fires, famine, and other national calamities, and the highest virtues which have ever characterized any people have always distinguished the American character; and, confiding in your benevolence, believe you will assist us with your liberal donations commensurate with the suffering circumstances of an afflicted and oppressed people.

The Reverend Mr. Gurley and General Green endorsed these remarks, "urging the claims of the destitute people on the humanity and assistance of the community."

Hoping to get a larger crowd, the committee "adjourned" the meeting until Thursday. But only fifteen or twenty persons attended. Those in attendance proceeded to organize a special committee of prominent Washingtonians.
to canvass the city. Although only one person, J. P. Ingle, showed up at its scheduled meeting, this committee did manage to draft a moving appeal which was published in the newspapers:

“He that hath two coats let him impart to him that hath none.” These words fell from the lips of our Savior. He said also, “When I was an hungered, ye fed me.” Although we are not Mormons, yet we feel for them because they are human beings and have been, by force, compelled to leave their good homes to perish in the wilderness, unless relieved. We must say, however, the efforts that the citizens of Washington are making (especially the Ladies) to relieve them is truly praiseworthy; yet there is one way that we can aid them to a great extent without suffering any inconvenience ourselves. They want clothing, and that we can give by taking one or two of perhaps a half dozen or more garments and giving to them; for remember, “He that hath two coats,” &c.

Places of deposit for the clothing were specified, and the members of the committee agreed to accept any donations on behalf of the Mormons. Dana had subscription lists printed and left copies with members of the special committee and at some of the hotels. Five dollars here, a dollar there, a few articles of clothing. The Beacon Lodge subscribed $6.50. A “colored woman named Jane Brent . . . wished to contribute her mite” and gave twelve and one-half cents. Every little bit helped. One day Dana met Peter Force, genial compiler of the four-volume *Tracts and Other Papers Relating Principally to the Origin, Settlement and Progress of the Colonies in North America* (Washington, 1836-46), who offered a fair price for “all the books, papers, and pamphlets touching the rise and progress of Mormonism, or any works thereon.” Dana urged the Saints in Philadelphia to send any material of this kind; it would bring in a few more dollars.

Dana’s efforts to canvass the different departments of government were quite discouraging. Often he sat in waiting rooms. At the Post Office Department he was told that this was a bad time of the month for soliciting; he should come back at the end of the month when the employees got their pay. President Polk was often ill. Finally, on October 17 Dana was ushered in to meet the president of the United States. All he records about this interview is, “He referred me to I Knox Walker his private secretary. He gave me ten dollars in behalf of the President.” At the State Department another ten dollars was donated by none other than James Buchanan.

When it became clear that the results were still discouraging, a small meeting of young ladies decided “that the ladies of Washington get up a tea party in order to carry out more effectually the object of raising means to alleviate our present suffering circumstances.” A committee of young ladies was appointed to visit the “Elderly Ladies in order to get their cooperation.”

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17*National Intelligencer*, October 22, 1847; *Daily National Whig*, October 23 and 27, 1847.


19Secretary of State in 1847, Buchanan was president of the United States at the time of the Utah War in 1857-58.
Several organizational meetings followed, leading eventually to an arrange-
ments committee with specific assignments.

Occasionally there was “static.” At one of the ladies’ preparation meetings
some dissent was expressed. At another meeting a lady asked Dana to explain
the cause of the Mormon persecutions. According to his diary,

I went on to tell them that Joseph Smith was considered to be a seditious person because
we all voted for Ford because he held out the scepter of mercy while the other cried out
expell and extermination. Compared those days with the day of the Saviour. Showed
them that Zion had to be built up before the Lord would appear in his glory. In a word
the Spirit constrained me to speak and I did so boldly bearing testimony to the truth of
the work to their astonishment.

Dana noted that some of the young ladies “in order to rebut some objections
brought against us as being ignorant dupes &c. proposed sending the gospel to
us, but in order to secure our affections they tell the objector that they had
better first feed us.”

After “careful inquiry” the ladies’ committee had their secretary draft a
statement: “Nothing is found in the impostures and superstitions imputed to
these people as a sect, under the villified name of Mormons, to shake their title
to the common offices of humanity, even if their claims upon the active benevo-
ence and charity of their fellow creatures were not rendered absolute by the
actual presence of want and misery in the direct extremes.”

Several places of deposit for contributions of money or clothing were designated and a tea party
on behalf of the “wretched outcast” was called for October 28.

Every effort was made to make the tea party a huge success. The Marine
Band was in attendance. Also performing were the Euterpean Minstrels, who
“generously postponed their own performances and volunteered their services
on this occasion, hoping thereby to increase the attractions for the evening, and
thus contribute to enlarge the contributions.”

Dolly Madison, widow of the late president, sent a contribution. Mrs. Polk, indisposed with the chills, sent “a
number of rare bouquets and a liberal supply of confectionery, including a
cedar tree hung full of French candies, kisses and sugar plumbs.” Mrs.
Macomb, widow of Major General Macomb, baked a large cake, in which she
“had deposited a gold ring worth about three dollars in the cake.” It was cut into
fifty pieces to be sold at twenty-five cents a share. The attendance was described
as “numerous,” and the “house was full — a refined and benevolent audience.”
There was a repeat performance on Friday, October 29, when the cake was cut.
Dana described the whole affair as “well attended by the aristocracy, as well as
those who did not move in so high a circle.” The music by the band and singers
“served to cheer every heart.” Agog at the display of table furniture and
silverware, he noted that the ladies were saying, “It was the best tea party ever
got up in Washington City.”

20 National Intelligencer, October 21 and 25, 1847. A useful interpretive study, containing
nothing on the present topic, is Keith Melder, “Ladies Bountiful: Organized Women’s Benevo-
21 National Intelligencer, October 28, 1847; National Whig, October 27, 1847.
Upon his departure from Washington on November 1, Dana had the following notice placed in the *Daily National Whig*:

Mr. Dana desires to return thanks to the citizens of Washington generally, but particularly to the Editors of the Press, to the Ministers of the Gospel, and to His Honor the Mayor, for the kindness and courtesy through which the public sympathy was awakened. No language can express the gratitude he feels towards those benevolent Ladies through whose exertions so much has been done to dry up the tears of many widows and orphans, and of others now suffering under an unjust persecution.

He had reason to be well satisfied with his accomplishments during a stay of only one month at the nation’s capital.

Upon returning to Philadelphia Dana met Colonel Kane, who hoped that Dana, and Robert Campbell, who now joined him, would wait until after a public meeting on November 3 before starting their return trip to Mount Pisgah. Since the Philadelphia meeting assumed some importance in the national publicity campaign, Dana’s account of it is revealing:

Went to the Declaration room in the eve. There were about 10 or 12 persons present. Br Campbell was called upon to make some remarks. There was but little done except passing some resolutions which will be published. The meeting adjourned and I returned to Sister Hunts.

Although the small attendance was doubtless discouraging, the Philadelphia meeting had more important objectives, which were fulfilled.

The printed report on the “Meeting for the Relief of the Mormons” gives the scenario. The meeting was organized “on motion of the Hon. Judge Kane,” father of Thomas L., who named as president the Hon. John Swift, mayor of Philadelphia. Vice presidents of the meeting were sixteen dignitaries. The meeting apparently proceeded like clockwork. The mayor briefly stated the object of meeting. Robert Campbell and Dana described the general condition of the suffering Saints, and Thomas L. Kane endorsed their statements, testifying of what he had seen. Resolutions, obviously prepared in advance, were presented and amended, and passed. In addition to describing the actual suffering, the resolutions made clear that the Mormons were loyal Americans: they had been granted permission to tarry on the public domain while preparing for their emigration westward; they had enlisted “in large numbers, in the military service of the United States, to prosecute remote and dangerous expeditions” (the Mormon Battalion); and the wives and children of these patriotic American soldiers were “among the destitute and sick of the parties that remain encamped on the prairies.” The conclusions were inescapable:

It is thus made to appear that grievous wrong has been sustained by this large body of American citizens; and that they are exposed to increased and calamitous suffering, if it be not averted by the active sympathies of their brother citizens within the United States.

Wherefore, Rejoicing in the ability of the American people to contribute to the relief of distress wherever found; yet recognizing as primary the duty to provide first for our own household; mindful too that while protection is the highest office of Govern-

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22 "Meeting for the Relief of the Mormons,” Thomas L. Kane file, Church Archives.
ment, the dispensation of charity is the holiest privilege of the citizens; This meeting has...

Resolved, That a Committee of twenty or more residents of the City and Districts, be appointed by the Chairman, to solicit donations for the relief of the Emigrant Mormons.

This was done. The committee, which included Thomas L. Kane as one of its members, reads like a roster of Philadelphia men of distinction. Thus, the meeting was not primarily for the raising of funds on the spot but for organizing a fund-raising campaign. The publicity function was furthered by the decision to send a copy of the proceedings to the president and vice president of the United States and "to each of our Representatives in Congress." Copies were also sent to editors of newspapers "throughout the United States."

During the fall of 1847 other Mormons had also been at work trying to raise funds. We do not have the complete story, but enough bits and pieces can be discovered to form a general impression. From the Mormon settlement at Garden Grove, Iowa, two or three men were sent out to solicit help "in the wealthy part of the country"; they came back with several hundred dollars.23 Elder John Brown, on a mission to the Southern States, reported the arrival of Amasa Lyman, Preston Thomas, and James H. Flanigan, who had been "sent out among the branches to gather means to aid the Presidency in removing to the Valley." Brown donated two hundred dollars.24

One of the most diligent of Mormon solicitors during these months was William I. Appleby, who in early 1847 had been left in charge of the branches in the eastern states.25 Appleby did not always succeed in raising the desired funds, as witness his failure to satisfy Mormon leader Almon W. Babbitt in February of 1847.26 But in the fall he came through in great style. W. W. Phelps, on assignment to purchase a printing press, had bought one in Boston, obtaining money for the purpose from Alexander Badlam, a generous Massachusetts Mormon. When Appleby was instructed to remit to Badlam the monies he had collected in the Philadelphia area, he sent sixty-one dollars. Then Appleby received a letter from Orson Hyde asking that five hundred dollars be raised "to liquidate a debt contracted by Bro. B. Young & H. C. Kimball & Heywood of Quincy Illinois for the migration from Nauvoo." This was a larger order, but Appleby knew where to go: Vermont. There he got the five hundred dollars from a Brother Parkhurst — three hundred as an advance on some property that Sister Mary Fairbanks had left to the church, and two hundred dollars was tithing for Parkhurst. The money was deposited in a New York City bank and a certificate of deposit mailed.

Appleby went to Philadelphia at the end of September. There Colonel Kane "presented me with a Check for one hundred and fifty dollars, which together with the five hundred I raised in Vermont, defrayed the demands of

23 Journal History, October 18, 1847.
24 Ibid., November 4, 1847.
25 Appleby to Brigham Young, January 29, 1847, Church Archives.
26 Journal History, February 3, 1847. Subsequent details regarding Appleby's activities are, unless otherwise indicated, taken from William I. Appleby Diary, Church Archives.
Heywood & Kimball, my expenses, and also means to provide for my family — and my expenses to the Camp at Council Bluffs, as I had received a letter from President B. Young requesting me to come and see them &c.” Kane also gave fifty dollars “to purchase a Dozen Gold pens, &c as a present to the ‘twelve’ Apostles of the Church.” Appleby purchased them, paying only fifteen dollars, and bought in addition a set of carpenter tools for Brigham Young. The remainder, with Kane’s permission, he used for his own expenses, writing, “May he not lose his reward.”

By early December Appleby reached Council Bluffs, made a report, and presented the gold pens as a present from Colonel Kane.27 Jesse C. Little was now instructed to replace Appleby as president over the Saints in the eastern states. Orson Hyde and Ezra T. Benson were assigned to go to the southern states “to get help.” Before their departure Benson, Hyde, and Lyman were supplied with credentials certifying their official role in soliciting “donations from the rich, and noble and benevolent,” and all within their reach.28 Obviously the need for aid was still pressing.29

Writing to Colonel Kane, who had written to mention the possibility of a general appeal, Brigham Young and his clerk Willard Richards stated the continuing need for charity:

"It is near two years since we were driven from our habitation and had any resources for income. We have had no raw material to manufacture; consequently our clothing is worn and useless or threadbare and cold . . . .

While thus looking round us and seeing this great people here in the wilderness, destitute of meat and clothing, and comforts of health and necessaries of sickness, teams and wagons to move forward, or money to procure them, or any means within their reach whereby they may better their condition, we feel it is a fit subject for an appeal to the American people, as suggested in your last.

We have heard of the Irish famine and of the liberal hand that has been extended from the American shore and rejoice that the spirit of philanthropy has not fled from the bosom of many a noble soul in our mother country; for we hope that our kind friend will find the time to embody the foregoing sentiments in an address and appeal to the rich, noble, liberal, benevolent and philanthropic, to unloose their purse strings in behalf of this suffering and patriotic people.30"

The letter, like the resolutions passed earlier in Philadelphia, emphasized the suffering of the Saints, their basic patriotism, and the duty of charity on the part of those who might not agree with the Mormons’ religion. President Young concluded by hoping that Colonel Kane might “adopt such measures to rouse the sympathy of the American people.”

Before the month was out Orson Hyde had raised more than five hundred dollars in St. Louis. “I shall probably get about one hundred more in cash, besides lots of sugar and coffee in the spring on my return,” he wrote. “I have also secured a press and type for the Bluffs to be sent up by the first boat with

27Wilford Woodruff Diary, December 3, 1847, Church Archives.
28Journal History, December 6, 1847.
29At the same time Apostle Orson Pratt was sent to assume the presidency of the mission in Great Britain.
30Journal History, December 6, 1847.
paper, ink, etc., and men to carry it on, also sash, doors, and glass for the house or office.”31 Apparently his soliciting was mainly among church members, for he noted that “the public mind is very heavy.”

Meanwhile, in early January 1848, Benson, Lyman, Erastus Snow, and Appleby started out. Traveling through “the country of former persecutions,” probably Illinois and Missouri, they did not consider it prudent to identify themselves. Instead, they traveled as “gentlemen from the East, as Col. Benson of Massachusetts, Esq. Mason (Bro. Lyman) of New Hampshire, Dr. Snow of Boston, and Judge Appleby of New Jersey.” As a result they “fared like kings, fondled and caressed by those we stayed with.”32 The strong personal attachment of these men was expressed in poetic form by William Appleby, as in the following lines addressed to Erastus Snow:

You go to raise a warning voice,
And make the wants of Zion known,
To raise some means — make her rejoice,
Dry up her tears — the widows moan.

May you be crown’d with great success.
May angels on your steps attend,
And with your thousands thus be blest,
When you return to meet your friends.33

During February and March the team of solicitors concentrated on New England and New York. They carried with them the following statement:

The undersigned are satisfied that Ezra T. Benson, J. C. Little, W. I. Appleby, and Erastus Snow, are the authorized agents of the Mormon Emigrants upon the Indian Prairie, to receive donations for their benefit. The undersigned approve of the Resolutions of the recent Meeting in Philadelphia, and earnestly commend the case of these suffering people to the kind consideration of the charitable.

The signatures, in addition to Kane’s, included Dr. Walter Channing, professor of obstetrics and medical jurisprudence at Harvard Medical School; Alexander Young, Unitarian minister and corresponding secretary of the Massachusetts Historical Society; Charles Sumner, lawyer, orator, later U.S. Senator; Josiah Quincy, mayor of Boston; and Charles Francis Adams, diplomat and man of letters.34 Such names went far to lend respectability to the campaign.

It is hard to tell how generous these prominent men were in actual donations. Appleby does list a fifty dollar donation from Josiah Quincy. Of great help to the campaign in Boston and later in Philadelphia were the labors and contributions of Alexander Badlam, then a zealous Mormon. “Brother

31Ibid., December 28, 1847.
32Ibid., January 17, 1848.
33Appleby Diary, January 27, 1848. The same diary entry records similar poems addressed to Ezra T. Benson and to Sister Benson, the last under the imposing title, “Lines to Sister Benson, on her husband Elder E. T. Benson, Mission for the Emigration of the Church, Relief of the Poor &c.”
34This statement in the front of Appleby’s diary seems to carry the actual signatures mentioned above as well as those of S. K. Lothrop, E. H. Chopin, Wm. H. Stoweard, John Weiss, and Geo. H. Throop.
Badlam is on hand as usual,” wrote Ezra T. Benson on February 14, “and will
do all he can; he says he will raise $1000.” Appleby’s diary records donations
ranging downwards from fifty dollars, some contributors giving only a dollar
or ten dollars or a dozen men’s or boys’ caps or a dozen females’ hose. Still the
campaign was pursued with determination and with organization. Agents were
appointed in places like New Bedford, and the Mormons gathered the funds
from these agents. Public meetings were held. At a lecture in Salem, Appleby
“set forth the necessities of my Brethren in the west.” Then they fanned out in
directions. Appleby went up through New Hampshire, and Vermont and
returned with $280 “clear of expenses.” Elder Benson went over into Connecti-
cut, J. C. Little to Rhode Island. The proceeds did not come in without effort,
Benson noting that “cash is hard to raise.” But on March 4 Appleby remarked
that “our success in raising means has came up to near our expectations, or at
least to mine!” On March 27 he was more specific: “We have raised altogether,
Brs. Benson, Snow, Little, Badlam, Page & myself of the Saints, and of others
not members of the Church, here in the Eastern States, for the benefit of the
Church at Council Bluffs about fourteen or fifteen hundred dollars.” Energetic
efforts had been expended and the results were at least moderately reassuring.

It was time to move the campaign to New York City. Again coming to the
assistance of the Mormons was Thomas L. Kane, who arranged to have a “Call
for Sympathy” published in the New York newspapers. Announcing a public
meeting for March 3, 1848, it stated in part:

In the vast and bleak Prairie wilderness, stretching between the Mississippi, the Missouri
and the Rocky Mountains, several thousands of human beings are now being wasted
away by destitution, hardship, and the sufferings incident to a hasty and violent expul-
sion from comfortable homes into an inhospitable wild. Many of them must die this
Winter, and for these sympathy is now too late; but some thousands will survive, and
these are in pressing need of seed-grain, iron for plows, repairing wagons, &c. and then
medicines required by their exposures and the fevers thence engendered. Five
thousand dollars, seasonably bestowed, will probably save the lives of two or three
thousand human beings, whose carcases must otherwise be left to the prairie-wolves in
the course of the famished march of this afflicted remnant to their new place of refuge,
shut in among the southern spurs of the Rocky Mountains.

The appeal was signed by twenty-five eminent New Yorkers, including Mayor
William V. Brady.” Other signers were Theodore Frelinghuysen, Mortimer Livingston, Theodore Sedgwick,
Stuyvesant, Thomas Dewitt, G. T. Bedell, Thomas H. Skinner, G. B. Cheever, Spencer H. Cone,
George Potts, George Peck, James Alexander, Erskine Mason, William Adams, M. S. Hutton,
Henry J. Whitehouse, Thomas E. Vermilye, John Knox.

The public meeting was held on March 3 with Mayor Brady presiding.
Vice presidents included two prominent New York City divines and Theodore Frelinghuysen, former vice-presidential candidate on the Whig ticket who was now president of the American Bible Society, president of the American Tract Society, and chancellor of the University of the City of New York. Colonel Kane spoke of the needs he had observed while he had been among the Mormons, whom he described as “a simple, kind-hearted and well meaning people...borne down by afflictions and deprivations.” Resolutions were then read by Congressman Benjamin F. Butler and unanimously passed. Again, it was resolved that “in view of human misery and destitution which we have the ability to mitigate, we know no difference of creed or sect.” Recalling the earlier generous contributions to relieve suffering in Greece and Ireland, the resolution stated that “it would not become them to suffer thousands of their own countrymen to perish.”

At the beginning of April, with Benson, Lyman, and Snow on their way back to Council Bluffs, Appleby returned to his home in New Jersey to catch his breath. Then he joined Alexander Badlam in Philadelphia, where they continued to raise funds from church members. From this source sixty dollars were forwarded to St. Louis. Then Appleby and Badlam, assisted somewhat by Elder Housekeeper of Philadelphia, began again to solicit funds from the general public. After one month, on May 9, having collected only about three hundred eighty dollars from the non-Mormon Philadelphians, they decided to end the campaign there.

In the meantime, Mormons who had not “gathered” with the Saints at Nauvoo or on the plains of Iowa were relentlessly pursued for donations. And they responded; few as they were, they probably gave as much as did all the non-Mormons of the country. But there were limits. “Not much can be done among the Saints,” wrote Ezra T. Benson from Boston on February 14, 1848. A similar glimpse of the pressure on Mormons comes from St. Louis, where in January 1848 a John Scott had come to raise money for Heber C. Kimball “by loan or otherwise.” Nathaniel H. Felt made the rounds and reported that “many that had not means sufficient to loan gave freely, and by this means I judge had accumulated about a hundred dollars.” Then Scott got up in meeting and “bore down upon the brethren in a most ungenerous way, insinuating threatenings of being in their way, in going to the mountains, etc., thundering forth his anathemas in a most astonishing manner, leaving the poor saints, who had strained every nerve, a very poor chance of ever standing in his presence in the Kingdom, etc., etc., if they did not hand over more money.” This led to a defense of the “trembling widows and hard-working Saints” by Felt, a letter to President Young, and an eventual letter from Orson Hyde, writing for President Young and the Council at Kanesville. “The favorable response which the repeated calls have met with that have been made upon the Saints in St. Louis,” Hyde wrote, “exhibit a degree of liberality and ability that is almost miraculous... No ill report of the Church as a body in St. Louis.

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41Journal History, February 14, 1848.
42Ibid., February 26, 1848.
will be believed here for a moment, let it be brought from whom it may, for nearly $2000 raised there within the last year of voluntary contributions is a stronger proof of righteousness and fidelity than any man's word can be against them."43 Such generosity did not relieve the St. Louis Saints from repeated requests, as those from Willard Richards in June 1848,44 who noted a few days later that "agents have been through this country and drained all the sources to keep Pres. Young and Kimball off with."45

In July 1848 Charles R. Dana started on another mission to the eastern states. By August he was in Washington, again willing to call on prominent people and frankly ask for help. He even called on Missouri Senator Thomas Benton. "I tried to work a miracle on him by soliciting a donation from him," Dana wrote, "but found that I had not power or faith enough to accomplish it."46 He called on Sam Houston, who "sympathized considerable with us because of our persecutions" and said "that those who caused it ought to be hung," Dana called twice on John Charles Frémont, the great Pathfinder, who seemed friendly. Two public meetings were held in Temperance Hall, but now Dana was more militant. Instead of emphasizing the common humanity and the obligation of charity, he tried to prove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. We do not know what, if any, money he collected at Washington.

Moving on to Richmond, Virginia, Dana encountered a mixed reception. There was some cooperation, some willingness on the part of newspaper editors to give brief notices about the purpose of his visit, some sympathy and good will from the clergy. But when he called on an Episcopalian minister, a servant handed him the following note:

Dear Sir:

After consultation with my vestry and due reflection I conclude not to aid you. If the Mormons will seek employment individually they need not suffer. If they wish to be sustained as a community we cannot aid, without aiding to sustain a gross imposture, as we think.

Yours &c.

William Norwood

Then on September 6 the Richmond Whig published an "outrageous attack" upon Brigham Young and Porter Rockwell, charging them with complicity in the attempted murder of Missouri Governor Boggs. Dana replied to Reverend Norwood and wrote a long reply to the newspaper article and had it published. There were still some friendly gestures, as when the Reverend Edwards on Sunday "made a most powerful appeal to his congregation to aid the Mormons." But there was no question in Dana's mind that the early signs of generosity had been stifled.

43Ibid., April 12, 1848.
44Ibid., June 5, 1848.
45Ibid., June 19, 1848. See Joseph Young Diary, Church Archives, for lists of donors, apparently all church members from St. Louis, in 1847-48.
46Charles Root Dana Autobiography, microfilm of holograph, Church Archives. Unless otherwise indicated information about Dana's second mission comes from this document.
At Fredericksburg Dana attempted to follow his program once again by calling on newspaper editors and the mayor. He found that the mayor, also editor of one of the newspapers, was friendly and sympathetic. It was decided to hold a public meeting to be presided over by the mayor — the earlier Philadelphia plan reasserting itself. But the meeting was so “thinly attended” that the mayor recommended postponing it until the next night. It must have been temporarily encouraging to hear the mayor speak out forcibly and declare that he would be “the first man to lift his arm in our defense here,” but the next night’s meeting was also attended by “few.” If any money was collected, it could not have been more than a few dollars.

After brief visits to Baltimore and Philadelphia Dana returned to Mount Pisgah for his wife. With her he went East to spend the winter of 1848-49 with relatives in New York state. Occasionally he would still call upon individuals and solicit funds, but clearly the great campaign was over. Dana returned to Mount Pisgah in the spring of 1849 and in 1850 migrated westward to the Salt Lake Valley.

At the same time Dana was on his second fund-raising mission, Thomas McKenzie was on his “book mission.” At the conference in April 1848 at Kanesville, Iowa, McKenzie had been called to “go through the United States and preach the gospel and collect books by donation and subscription to establish schools in the valley.” He would also collect money when possible along with articles of clothing, but the special assignment was that of gathering books. His diary recounts his experiences at Cincinnati, where he called on several newspaper editors who agreed to place a notice in their papers. Then he went from house to house. Although some were “vary abusive,” he did collect a few dollars and some books. Elsewhere in Ohio he was subjected to much ridicule and time after time was refused a meeting hall in which to make his appeal. Finally the Universalists gave him permission to use their hall. He put up handbills announcing the meeting, but “there was not over a dozen people came out and they did not give one cent.”

Crossing the Great Lakes by steamer, McKenzie reached Buffalo, New York. There he became very sick and took three weeks to recuperate at the home of a Brother Neale. He called on individual church members, usually receiving donations of one dollar each. Returning to Ohio, he picked up his family, and took them to New Orleans, where he left them “in the hands of the Lord.” By sea he traveled to New York City, arriving in January of 1849. He gave lectures on the streets, knocked on doors, and called on leading men, most of whom would not help. But it was not a total loss. He was able to gather about eighty dollars and some books. Most interesting was his experience at the American Bible Society, the president of which said “he supposed we did not believe the bible.” After listening to McKenzie’s explanation the society agreed to contribute ninety-five dollars’ worth of Bibles.

47 Thomas McKenzie Diary, Church Archives, entry for April 6, 1848. See letters of appointment in Journal History, April 20, 1848.
48 While welcome, this donation was not notably generous from a society one of whose functions was precisely the free distribution of Bibles. See Carl Bode, The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), chap. 10.
At Boston, again using letters of recommendation, he met the mayor, now Mr. Bigelow, who was "very kind." With a recommendation from the mayor he called on newspaper editors but now found them reluctant to do anything. So McKenzie, a never-say-die type, went from house to house. By April 26, 1849 he had collected $174 there. Books were packed and sent. Traveling down to Philadelphia, he gave a lecture and collected some donations, including fifty dollars in cash from Colonel Kane. The results were far from spectacular. When he called on several members of the clergy, they refused help. When he went from house to house among the Quakers, he reported that "their souls were not big enough to give me even a crust of bread."

Even at its peak the campaign had had its discouragements, but now further efforts seemed futile. By 1849, of course, the crisis had largely passed. The refugees starving and freezing on the plains of Iowa had been moved to more permanent settlements at Kanesville or on to the Great Basin — those who survived, that is. The continuing migration had raised the population of Great Salt Lake City to something between five and ten thousand. Hardship was still a frequent experience, to be sure, but the condition of extreme desperation seems to have passed for most. Finally, it was in 1849 that the Mormons began to benefit from the Gold Rush, with forty-niners by the hundreds passing through their territory and contributing to a small economic boom.49

How much was collected during the different phases of the fund-raising campaign? Although individual missionaries kept careful accounts, no comprehensive records have survived. Answering the question is made more difficult by the simultaneous solicitations among church members and non-members and by the fact that some receipts from both directions came in the form of clothing, books, or other commodities. In the appeal announcing the New York City meeting a goal of five thousand dollars was mentioned, which suggests the general magnitude of the hopes. These hopes were disappointed: "The meeting in New York resulted rather in words than works," said Erastus Snow. But prior to this meeting Snow had raised about a thousand dollars and hoped to raise "about as much more."50 In May Appleby estimated that about three thousand dollars had been collected from the non-Mormons of Washington, Boston, Salem, New Bedford, New York, and Philadelphia. When he compared this to the estimated two hundred fifty thousand dollars that had been donated for the relief of the Irish in 1846, he could not help but exclaim, "May the God of the Saints judge the rulers of this nation and reward them according to their deeds."51 A similar disappointment was expressed by Brigham Young after the return of Hyde, Benson, and Lyman from their mission to gather means in the eastern and southern states: "They had but poor success, the Saints who had riches loving them better than the cause of Zion;

50 Journal History, March 13, 1848. The results of the New York meeting must have been doubly disappointing in view of Kane’s earlier hopes that it would raise “several thousand dollars.” Thomas L. Kane to Elisha Kane, February 20, 1848, photocopy of holograph, Western Americana Collection, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.
51 Appleby Diary, May 22, 1848.
and the people of the world were very much afraid of their means being turned to a bad advantage, and considered it safer to retain it in their possession, but were very profuse in their expressions of commiseration and sorrow.\footnote{Journal History, July 17, 1848.}

On the other hand, it seems almost certain that more than five thousand dollars, perhaps closer to ten thousand dollars, were collected in donations. Appleby's estimate included only the one phase of the campaign and explicitly excluded contributions from Mormons. Luman A. Shurtliff reported that in May 1847 he returned to Garden Grove, having "begged for the saints at least $1,500."\footnote{"Biographical Sketch of Life of Luman Andros Shurtliff," p. 71, typescript, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.} We know that one similar mission to the South brought back more than one thousand dollars, and there were undoubtedly other contributions here and there that would enlarge the total. Even excluding the "care packages," which must certainly have been welcome to those who received them during a time of great hardship and deprivation, the cash contributions were in the magnitude of several thousand dollars. While this was not a large percentage of the total needs, the Mormons did have other sources of income: the sale of properties in Illinois and elsewhere, individual and group work projects in Iowa and Missouri, and the pay from the Mormon Battalion.\footnote{No one, I think, has put all of this together analytically. On the sale of Nauvoo properties see the Almon W. Babbitt file, Church Archives. Various diaries tell of work projects — splitting rails, making and selling baskets, etc. Not all of the pay of the Mormon Battalion was returned to their families — see the John D. Lee diaries as edited by Juanita Brooks — but several thousand dollars were available from this source.} Their immediate needs were for wagons (selling from $40 to $100), oxen ($10 to 14), horses ($20), grain (25 cents a bushel), etc.\footnote{The late T. Edgar Lyon, of Nauvoo Restoration, Inc., provided this information on average prices. Other examples are contained in the January 7, 1847, letter from the Kanesville City Council. \textit{Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1846-1847}, ed. Elden Jay Watson (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1971), p. 496.} For equipping the advance companies and for helping to tide some poverty-stricken families through a crisis situation the donations, while less than might have been hoped, were of substantial assistance.

It is of great significance that the Mormon relief campaign started in 1847, within a few months of the great Irish relief campaign, which climaxed in February. The dual crop failures in 1845 and 1846 had there created a great famine by the winter of 1846-47. Starving was made worse by the pestilence. People died like flies — within a few years over a million had died — and another million and a half were forced to emigrate. Responding to the obvious need for help, American humanitarians had in early 1847 held large public meetings in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and many other cities. The rich and prominent had attended, had acted as sponsors, had delivered addresses. The clergy had participated. Communities had been systematically canvassed. Playing upon the sympathies of the rich, speeches and broadsides had described the suffering in poignant terms. Appeals were couched in terms of the duty of Christian charity but also in terms of the larger obligation of humanitarianism.\footnote{Merle Curti, \textit{American Philanthropy Abroad: A History} (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Uni-}
Just a few months later the Mormon fund-raisers followed identical procedures. Public meetings, newspaper advertising, sermons in the churches, canvassing in the wards — the organization followed the pattern which had been established in the Irish relief campaign. The appeals to Christian charity and to humanitarianism were largely the same. Attempting to set aside religious prejudice, as they had done for the Irish Catholics, the philanthropists described the Mormons as human beings in need. One additional note was possible for the later campaign: If we have been so generous for those in need outside the country, cannot we now respond to the needs of our own countrymen?

While the Mormons may have learned something from the earlier campaign, it was probably the major deterrent to a dramatically successful effort. If the Mormons raised only two or three percent as much as their predecessors earlier in the year, this was partially due to their smaller numbers, the more limited nature of the campaign, and the unpopularity of their religion. But certainly the emotional exhaustion of the potential donors, an inability to become stirred up so soon after their earlier breast beating, must have been a major limiting factor. If this is true, then the Mormons were victims of the calendar.

The campaign to help the distressed Mormons is a case study of a humanitarian effort prior to the rise of large foundations and government tax laws that later encouraged philanthropy. Recognizing that almost everything depended on public opinion, the Mormon solicitors and their friends sought to enlist the aid of the opinion shapers of the day — mayors, clergymen, newspaper editors — and were partially successful in doing so. Public opinion, at least in the late 1840s, was not as overwhelmingly anti-Mormon as it has sometimes been portrayed. Many agreed that the Mormons had been wronged and were deserving of whatever charity the community at large could muster.

Through it all, however, it is clear that sympathy for the Mormons did not mean real respect for their religion. And in the long run there were limits to what the most conscientious efforts in the private sector could accomplish.

57Ezra T. Benson reported that "he found many people in the Eastern and Middle States who readily acknowledged that the saints had been driven from their homes." Journal History, April 30, 1848. The various appeals signed by eminent citizens of the different cities confirm this assertion. A less sympathetic point of view was expressed by the Reverend William Norwood (see above) and consistently by Thomas Sharp, editor of the Warsaw (Ill.) Signal.
THE T. EDGAR LYON MORMON HISTORY AWARD

The Mormon History Association is pleased to announce the T. Edgar Lyon Mormon History Award, created to memorialize the life and contributions of the late Dr. T. Edgar Lyon and perpetuate the high standards of historical scholarship which he followed in his work.

A $400 cash award, given by the family of T. Edgar Lyon, will be awarded at the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association commencing in 1982 for the best published article in the field of Mormon history.
The role of Mormons in the California gold fields is one of the more neglected chapters of the economic history of the western states, as well as of the history of the Mormon commonwealth itself. While much has been recorded of the role of Mormons in the initial gold discovery at Coloma, little has been written of the events preceding that discovery, and even less of subsequent involvement. This neglect has led to the general conclusion that Mormons played only a minor and very short-lived role.

The truth is that there was substantial Mormon involvement in the gold fields, far beyond participation in the initial discoveries at Coloma and Mormon Island, and extending far beyond 1848. In fact, the Mormon presence in the gold fields constituted the first substantial church colonization attempt, albeit temporary, outside of the Salt Lake and Weber valleys. It appears that between nine hundred and a thousand adult Mormons may have been involved in the gold fields between 1848 and 1857, with as many as eighty family units, including women and children. As many as 15 to 25 percent of the overall 1847 adult male pioneer group and 50 percent of several subgroups of Mormon pioneers of that year went into the gold fields. In contrast to many other early Mormon economic efforts, this one was highly successful, bringing probably as much as one hundred thousand dollars in gold into the Salt Lake Valley from

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1These groups include the captains of ten, who were the leaders of small groups of Mormon families in the westward trek, those identified as Mississippi Saints, and those family units which dropped out of the Mormon Battalion and wintered at Pueblo in present-day Colorado.
1848 to 1851, providing gold backing for the Mormon money system and the "foreign exchange" needed for economic expansion.

**SETTING THE STAGE**

The stage was set for Mormon participation in the California gold fields possibly as early as 1845. Additional stage setting took place in 1846 and 1847, with as many as five distinct groups of Mormons being put in place for the discovery of gold in January of 1848.

In 1845 William B. Ide, who is thought to have been a Mormon, was the co-leader of a group of California immigrants rumored to have been sent by church leaders to prepare the way for Mormon settlement in California or Oregon. Many of Ide's men were caught up in the California Bear Flag Rebellion of 1845-46, eventually joining with U.S. forces in the conquest of California. A number of these individuals became involved in the gold rush. The extent of their involvement with both gold and the church has yet to be determined.²

While the story of Ide is sketchy, the stories of the next two groups are not. On July 20, 1846, the S. S. *Brooklyn* landed at Yerba Buena (later San Francisco) with some 238 Mormons from the East Coast. Led by Sam Brannan, they concentrated in San Francisco, but also established colonies or groups elsewhere, the most sizable (though temporary) one being New Hope on the Stanislaus River, a tributary of the San Joaquin River and near gold country.³

Awaiting word from their prophet, Brigham Young, the *Brooklyn* Saints established homes and furnished labor and leadership to pre-gold rush northern California. By the time they received definite word as to the permanent location of the body of the church in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in the early fall of 1847, it was too late for most of them to join their brethren that season. Thus, two hundred or so *Brooklyn* Saints were in place when gold was discovered in January 1848.

The third group of Mormons in the vicinity of the gold fields consisted of former U.S. soldiers most of whom had been members of the Mormon Battalion. They had reached San Diego on January 30, 1847, having left the Mormon camps of southern Iowa in July 1846. There were also several Mormons among the New York Volunteers sent to California by sea. Recently discovered evidence of this involvement needs to be explored in greater detail, but at least two Mormons involved in the gold fields appear to have been part of the group.⁴

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Most of the Battalion boys were mustered out in July 1847 and traveled north to the Sacramento Valley, hopefully to meet the vanguard of Mormon pioneers which they thought to be headed for California. They went in two groups, one along the El Camino Real and the other through the gold country east of the San Joaquin River. Upon learning that their fellow religionists would remain in the Great Basin, and being advised not to proceed to the Valley that season unless they had sufficient means to maintain themselves over the winter, 150 to 200 Battalion veterans remained in California, most of them in the vicinity of New Helvetia (Sutter's Fort and later Sacramento), furnishing much needed labor to the ranchers, farmers, and other entrepreneurs of the area. They were thus on site when gold was discovered the following year. Others were scattered throughout northern California, while some associated with the Saints living in San Francisco.

In July 1847 eighty-one of the Battalion boys re-enlisted in the U.S. Army for an additional six months, being scheduled to be mustered out in January of 1848. This was the group known as the Mormon Volunteers. They were serving primarily in the southern settlements, though a few appear to have been stationed in the north.\footnote{Journal History of the Church, December 31, 1847, pp. 2-7, Church Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.}

A fourth group was also on location. While this group is also obscure, we know somewhat more about it than we do about the group led by William B. Ide and the New York Volunteers. At least we now know a good deal about the group's leader, Elder Thomas Rhoads. Baptized into the Mormon faith in 1835, Rhoads left Ray County, Missouri, in the spring of 1846, leading a family group of about forty persons hoping to join Brigham Young and the Saints on the Platte River. Young had hoped that year to reach California, which then included not only the Pacific Slope but also the country between the Sierra Nevada Mountains and the Rockies.

Some of the Rhoads company were Mormons, though we are as yet uncertain as to the number. This group entered California in the first part of October 1846, as did a few scattered Mormons, including some from the ill-fated Donner-Reed Party, who made their way west in other pioneer companies that year. Settling in the country to the east of Sutter's Fort, mainly on Dry Creek and the Cosumnes River, the Rhoads family members were living in the midst of gold country.

The family folklore of the Utah descendants of Thomas Rhoads asserts that persons working for Thomas discovered gold in 1847, but that Rhoads, in agreement with Sutter, kept the existence of the precious metal secret, mining it on shares. There is no documentation for this "discovery," but the fact that the Rhoads family lived where they did and that Thomas had accumulated a reported seventeen thousand dollars by the summer of 1849 lends some credence to the story. Irrespective of the truth of the tale, the Rhoads group, a

number of whom were Mormons, were at least nearby when the first recorded
discovery of gold took place.\textsuperscript{6}

Besides these four groups of Mormons, there were several members of a
Mormon relief train sent to the southern settlements of California in the winter
of 1847-48 under the leadership of Asahel A. Lathrop in conjunction with
Orrin Porter Rockwell and Elijah K. Fuller. Lathrop and Rockwell would later
become involved in the gold fields. Leaving the camp of the Saints in Salt Lake
Valley on November 18, 1847, with Jefferson Hunt, senior captain of the
Battalion, as guide, the group arrived at the Williams Ranch in southern
California in late December. Their route, which travelers on their way from
Santa Fe, New Mexico, to the California settlements had been using for years,
became the principal southern or winter road to the gold fields.

Sent to secure needed supplies on credit with the help of the California
Saints, most of the group left for the Salt Lake Valley under Jefferson Hunt on
February 14, 1848, a few days after gold was discovered but before they could
have received word of it. Some time after their arrival in California, Rockwell
and several others evidently visited the Saints in the northern settlements,
carrying a letter from the high council in Salt Lake asking for support. While
this small group may have reached the Saints in the north too late for the
Coloma discovery, they were probably involved at Mormon Island in February
and early March. Rockwell was evidently associated with several Battalion boys
in the illegal minting of gold coins.\textsuperscript{7}

All in all, three to four hundred Mormons were in or near the gold fields
when gold was discovered at Coloma in January 1848. Were it not for the later
mistaken idea that Brigham Young absolutely opposed the mining of gold
itself, or even going to California to seek gold, the presence of such a large
number of Mormons on the Coast at the time of the Coloma discovery probably
would have been viewed by the faithful as part of the divine plan for Mormon
settlement of the West.

\textbf{Mormons and the Discovery of Gold}

The story of the role of Mormons in the initial gold discovery, which
precipitated the gold rush, is a familiar one. It is perhaps sufficient to point out
that at least six Mormon Battalion boys — Henry W. Bigler, Azariah Smith,
James S. Brown, William J. Johnston, Alexander Stephens, and a man named
Barger — were present at Sutter's Mill at Coloma with foreman James Marshall
on January 24, 1848, when gold was found in the mill race. Other Mormons
were nearby.\textsuperscript{8}

Peter L. Wimmer, another participant in the initial discovery, also may well

\textsuperscript{6}Gayle R. Rhoades and Kerry R. Boren, \textit{Footprints in the Wilderness: A History of the Lost Rhoades
Mines} (Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1971), pp. 1-40. See also my self-published \textit{Thomas Rhoads,
the Wealthiest Mormon Gold Miner} (Provo, Utah, 1980).

\textsuperscript{7}Harold Schindler, \textit{Orrin Porter Rockwell: Man of God, Son of Thunder} (Salt Lake City: University
of Utah Press, 1966) pp. 175-176. See also Journal History, November 16, 1847, pp. 2-5; James
Ferguson to W. A. Kennedy, April 2, 1848, Church Archives.

\textsuperscript{8}Rodman W. Paul, \textit{The California Gold Discovery: Sources, Documents, Accounts and Memoirs
relating to the Discovery of Gold at Sutter's Mill} (Georgetown, California: Talisman Press, 1967)
presents a detailed account of the Mormon involvement in the discoveries.
have been a Mormon. Most members of his family, including a brother, two sisters, his mother, and later his father, were members of the church. Wimmer associated with Latter-day Saints and even received an apostle, Amasa Lyman, into his home in 1850 and Mormon missionaries as late as 1857. It was his sister, Jemima Wimmer Powell, and her husband, James (who were reportedly working for the Rhoads family at the time) who are credited by some of the Utah Rhoadses with being the first to discover gold.9

An attempt was made by Sutter and Marshall to keep the Coloma gold discovery a secret, but the word soon spread among the close-knit Mormons of northern California. In fact, the next major gold discovery, an even richer one, was made a few weeks later by Mormon Battalion boys at what became known as Mormon Island on the South Fork of the American River, northeast of Sutter's Fort and Natoma where they were constructing a grist mill for Sutter. Within a few months between two and three hundred persons, most of them Mormons and many from San Francisco, had staked claims in that area, constituting the first real California gold rush.

Sam Brannan attempted to cash in on the rich find in at least two ways. First, despite the fact that he was publishing a newspaper, the *California Star*, he apparently attempted to keep news of the gold discovery secret until he could establish stores at Mormon Island and Coloma to take advantage of the needs of the anticipated stampede of gold miners. He already maintained a store at Sutter's Fort. Second, he attempted, successfully for a while, to collect as much as 30 percent of the "diggings" from his co-religionists as tithing, contributions for a temple, and as payment for supposedly securing their mining claims. However, as Mormon confidence in his leadership waned, and as non-Mormons over whom he had no influence established mining claims in the area and refused to pay, Mormons followed suit, but not before Brannan had collected enough to provide a financial stake for his multitudinous business schemes.10

Even while working their gold finds, many of the Battalion boys, within a few weeks of the discoveries, began to lay plans for their removal to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, implementing those plans in June and July 1848. While rendezvousing in what became known as Pleasant Valley, they discovered more gold. Upon the return of some of them the next year, the site was relocated, becoming known as Sly Park and Newton.

These men were to blaze a new wagon trail over the Sierra Nevadas, south of Lake Tahoe and through Carson Valley. The latter area was to be the site of the first discovery of Nevada gold the next year by Abner Blackburn, a Battalion member, and other Mormon companions. Their trail would become the major road to the gold fields, becoming known as the Mormon Emigrant Trail. Many of the Forty-niners and those to come later would be guided either by Mormons or by one of two published Mormon guides to the gold fields.11

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9Wimmer family genealogical records, copy secured from Wimmer Family organization. See also Rhoades and Boren, *Footprints in the Wilderness*, pp. 30-40.

10See my unpublished book manuscript, "California's Mormon Argonauts," chap. 23, for the rationale behind these conclusions.

11There were at least two written guides prepared by Mormons. One was hand-written and entitled "The Ira J. Willis Guide to the gold fields." See Irene D. Paden's article by that title in
In addition to the finds at Coloma, Mormon Island, and adjacent areas, Mormons are said to have been involved in gold discoveries some distance to the south, in Mariposa country, the southernmost Mormon find, Mormon Bar, being located on the famous John C. Fremont floating land grant. While yet undocumented, those involved were possibly from a group of about thirty-five of the Battalion re-enlistees known as the Mormon Volunteers. After the Mormon Volunteers were mustered out in the spring of 1848, many of them had gone to work building fence for Colonel Williams. Upon having the gold rumors verified in the summer of 1848, they moved northward, probably over the inland route along the base of the Sierra Nevadas, undoubtedly prospecting as they went. It is also possible that the discovery was made by New Hope colonists, other Brooklyn Saints, or other Battalion veterans from the north.

In addition to the find at Mariposa, it was possibly one of these groups that made the initial discoveries in 1848 known as the Mormon Diggings, on what would become known as Mormon Creek, which flowed through Mormon Gulch, several miles west of the Mexican village of Sonora.

Mormons were also among the first to discover gold up the North Fork of the American River from Mormon Island, at what became known as another Mormon Bar, and to the north of that at Mormon Ravine. They also discovered gold at Salmon Falls and Negro Hill on the South Fork of the American River. In addition, they were among the first to establish claims along the Middle Fork of the American River above present-day Auburn — at Murderer’s Bar and Slap Jack Bar — as well as in what became known as another Mormon or Hudson Gulch on the northern slopes of Mamaluke hill near present-day Georgetown.

Greenwood Valley, between the Middle and South Forks of the American River, was also soon the site of several Mormon gold mining camps, such as Pilot Hill, McDowell’s Hill, and Louisville. Hangtown (Placerville) was a temporary home for many Battalion veterans. The Rhoads clan maintained two mines, one near Folsom in Sacramento County and the other near Diamond Springs in El Dorado County. Mormons also apparently became involved in camps as far north as Bear River, at Rough and Ready, Coyote Springs, and Nevada City.

NEWS OF GOLD SPREADS EAST

News of the initial gold discoveries was possibly taken east in the spring of...
1848 by two groups of Mormons. One group consisted of a few men under Porter Rockwell. After Rockwell had been released (or escaped) following his arrest as a counterfeiter toward the end of March, he had returned south. Leaving the Williams Ranch on April 12, he proceeded to Salt Lake, arriving there June 5. Four days later the Salt Lake high council sent a message to Brigham Young. The message only hints at gold: “Some few (of the brethren) are disaffected and have got what we call the California fever.” The message was sent by way of others, including two nephews of Brigham Young, Brigham H. Young and John Y. Greene, the latter having been with Rockwell. Porter was soon to follow.14

Another scenario of the first news of gold reaching Brigham Young involves a group of men, principally Battalion boys, (including William and Nathan Hawk, Silas Harris, Sanford Jacobs, and Richard Slater) who were commissioned by Sam Brannan to carry the news of gold eastward — not only by mouth and letter but by way of the special April 1 issue of his California Star. Traveling over the snow-burdened Sierra Nevadas via the Truckee and Humboldt rivers, part of the little group reached Salt Lake and left for Brigham Young's camp on July 9. If Brigham's nephews and Porter Rockwell weren't the first to carry the message of gold to Brother Brigham, this group probably was.15

While the arrival of these groups at the Mormon camps strung out across the prairie is recorded in the Journal History, there is no mention of gold. In fact, the church record is silent on the subject of the news of gold in Salt Lake Valley, even though the news of it was contained in the California Star, copies of which undoubtedly remained in the Valley. It was from the April 1 issue of the Star, delivered at St. Louis, that the news of California gold was soon spread throughout the world. This edition was published more than a month before Brannan reportedly rode wildly through the sleepy village of San Francisco crying “Gold! Gold! On the American River!” setting off the world's greatest gold rush.16

THE EFFECTS OF THE GOLD DISCOVERY ON DESERET

When the enriched Battalion boys reached Salt Lake in September 1848, their stories of affluence, evidenced by their fine horses and accoutrements, and especially by their bags of gold, triggered an expected reaction. Their poverty-stricken fellow Mormons in Deseret understandably wanted to take advantage of the gold too. However, it was then too late in the season to travel the northern route to California. Memories of the Donner tragedy were still fresh. Most would have to wait for spring, though a few would find their way that winter, via the more dangerous and less known southern route.

Brigham Young returned to the Valley at about the same time as the Battalion boys. Observing the California gold fever, he attempted to keep it

14Journal History, June 9, 1848, p. 2; June 21, 1848, p. 2; July 11, 1848, p. 1.
15Ibid., April 1, 1848, p.4, and July 27, 1848, p.1; Silas Harris Sketch, pp. 1-2, Lee Library.
under control. But he faced a dilemma. He was perceptive enough to know that gold was needed to purchase supplies from the West Coast. It was also needed as a medium of exchange and as a source of investment funds. He and the other church leaders might even be able to use a little of it themselves. But manpower was also needed to plow, plant, irrigate, and harvest. He could not risk draining off the needed manpower.

Something had to be done to calm the gold fever. Getting the Battalion boys to deposit their gold with him would do some good. They would no longer have it to brandish before the incredulous eyes of the beleagured Saints, living at the edge of starvation.

A few weeks after his arrival, the church leader opened up his “Brigham Young’s Daily Transactions in Gold Dust” account, receiving dust and coin from the Battalion boys and Brooklyn Saints who had recently arrived. An attempt was then made to make gold coins. After a few were minted and paid out in December 1848, the crude crucibles broke, forestalling that effort. But Brigham Young called for the boys to continue to deposit their dust, receiving in return hand-printed paper currency to be issued on a 100 percent reserve basis. This crude money was soon replaced by currency printed on a small improvised hand press and eventually on a larger printing press, constituting the first printing in Deseret. Even the currency of the defunct Kirtland Anti-Banking Society was called into service. The gold dust received in the account that first season amounted to about eighty-five hundred dollars.

Preachment was also needed. On October 1, 1848, Brigham Young said, almost timorously, to a group of Saints assembled, “If we were to go to San Francisco and dig up chunks of gold ... it would ruin us.... If we find gold and silver, we are in bondage directly. To talk of going away from this valley for anything is like vinegar in my eyes. They who love the world have not their affections placed upon the Lord.”

Having hopefully cooled the gold fever somewhat, but still needing gold, Young proceeded to call selected men to go to California, the first group leaving sometime before October 19. On that date Thomas Grover, a member of the Salt Lake high council, belatedly joined this company, the membership of which is unknown, although it probably included Levi Riter and Ebenezer Hanks. A second company of about twenty men, some of whom had just arrived from the gold fields, was called on November 26 to go to California under the leadership of Apostle Amasa Lyman and Orrin Porter Rockwell. What happened to this group is unknown, but Lyman and Rockwell did not go until the following spring. Most of the group later reached the gold fields.

17 Brigham Young’s Daily Transactions in Gold Dust, vol. 1, December 10, 1848, Church Archives.
18 Journal History, October 1, 1848, p. 2.
19 Thomas Grover, Sketchbook, pp. 31-32, and Thomas Grover to Brigham Young, October 19, 1848, copies in my files. Levi Riter’s involvement is detailed in Kate B. Carter, Heart Throbs of the West, 12 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1940-51), 7:402-8. Hanks’s involvement may be inferred from “A Short History of Andrew Jackson Workman,” pp. 1-5.
To some these callings may seem to contradict Brother Brigham's policy. However, his true attitude may be seen in a quotation from his journal. Reporting the arrival in the Valley of some former gold miners, he said, "The Saints can be better employed in raising grain and building houses in this vicinity than in digging gold in Sacramento, unless they are counseled to do so."\(^{21}\)

As the spring of 1849 approached, the Mormon leaders were still faced with their dilemma. In fact, it had worsened. By the end of February more paper currency had been issued than they had in dust.\(^{22}\) They needed more gold to back their money. In addition, their people also needed money for both consumption and investment purposes. Few, if any, surpluses existed with which to secure cash, and credit was uncertain and expensive. While the Saints had survived the winter, they had barely done so. Could not some go to the gold fields, work a few months and purchase much needed supplies, returning home in the fall with their gold? But Brigham Young still saw the need for labor in Deseret as being superior to the need for gold. There was a real danger of having the cream of the infant economy's manpower siphoned off to the gold fields, neglecting the cultivation of the virgin agricultural lands.

Consequently Young initiated an even firmer public policy of resistance to what was the natural, and to some the economically rational, thing to do. In the spring of 1849 he and his assistants began to preach strongly against going to California, threatening disfellowshipment for those who did not remain in the Valley. However, recognizing the continued need for gold, the astute church leader again called Apostle Amasa M. Lyman and about twenty unidentified others, as well as Porter Rockwell, to go to California via the northern route as soon as the weather and accumulated snows permitted. Others may well have been given permission to go. In addition, some of the disillusioned and rebellious began to leave on their own. Because of the secrecy involved, it is difficult to differentiate between those called or given permission to go and those who went in defiance of their leader.

It appears that President Young intended that a permanent Mormon presence be established on the West Coast, with Charles C. Rich as the appointed resident apostle. Among those going west were a number of family units, including many of the Mississippi Saints and the Battalion members associated with them at Pueblo, Colorado, during the winter of 1846-47. Lyman had met and associated with this group as they moved west from Fort Laramie in 1847 and many of them had settled at Cottonwood on land assigned him by Brigham Young. Interestingly, Sam Brannan had accompanied the group into the Valley after his abortive attempt to induce Brigham Young to continue to the coast. Also probably involved that spring were captains of ten from the 1847 migration. About half of these men, many with their families, were in the gold fields by 1850.\(^{23}\)


\(^{22}\)Daily Transaction in Gold Dust, vol. 1, unnumbered page entitled "Daily Transactions at one view." The rationale for this conclusion is found in my "California's Mormon Argonauts," chap. 6.

\(^{23}\)These conclusions were reached after comparing the lists of Mississippi Saints, Battalion drop-out family units, and captains of ten associated with the 1847 migration with those at least
Because of the currency crisis, Lyman’s first priority apparently was to gather up and send to Utah as much gold as possible as soon as he was able. Arriving at Sutter’s Fort on May 25 after a forced march of forty-five days, the apostle immediately began to visit the California Saints, most of whom were at or near Mormon Island.

Meanwhile, Sam Brannan, who had returned to California in 1847, was becoming increasingly prosperous and rebellious and was being rejected by the Saints as their leader. He refused to turn over the tithes and offerings collected from the Saints, but probably had little if any gold or liquid funds anyway. Along with his other investments, he had to pay for the supplies laid in at his stores. He also built the City Hotel and was the major developer of other projects on the Embarcadero at what became Sacramento. 24

Lyman had ecclesiastical precedence over Brannan and church discipline could once more be exercised. Traveling day after day, the indefatigable leader was able to collect over four thousand dollars in tithing, mostly in gold dust, by July 6. 25

Another Lyman mission was to induce some of the wealthier brethren to emigrate. Thomas Rhoads, with a reported seventeen thousand dollars in gold dust, and William Glover, a leader of the Brooklyn Saints with several thousand dollars in gold, were convinced to emigrate to Zion, as were a number of other Brooklyn Saints, Battalion boys, and others. Loaded with as much as twenty-five thousand dollars in gold dust, the Mormon gold train, involving about fourteen families, left Sutter’s Fort shortly after July 6 with Thomas Rhoads as captain, Thomas Grover as the custodian of church tithing gold, and William Glover as the unofficial historian. During their trip to Salt Lake via Carson Valley, they were threatened by suspected highwaymen and marauding Indians. They arrived in Salt Lake on September 28, 1849. Rhoads and Glover deposited much if not all of their gold in the gold accounts in October. 26

Other successful Mormon gold miners came to Utah that fall. Between October 27 and December 31, fifty-two persons — twenty-two of them Battalion boys and two Brooklyn Saints — deposited $10,744 in gold dust and coins to the gold accounts. In addition, between January 3 and June 30, 1850, another $12,487 came into the accounts. 27

In the fall of 1849, professionally prepared crucibles having been received, gold coins began to be successfully minted and paid out in exchange for gold dust. Some of the gold was also deposited as tithing, and a substantial amount of currency was paid out to meet various church, civil, and personal expenses.

With Lyman’s immediate objectives accomplished, he directed the Mor-

tentatively identified by me as Mormons in the gold fields. See my “California's Mormon Argonauts,” chapter 9.


25Amasa M. Lyman, Diary, July 6, 1849, Amasa M. Lyman Collection, Church Archives.


27Daily Transactions, January 3 to June 20, 1849.
mon mining activities at the Mormon Diggings along the American River and its tributaries. He also apparently secured some gold for himself, making deposits to his own account in the gold accounts the following fall when he returned to Utah.\(^\text{28}\)

The arrival of the gold train in Salt Lake set off another flurry of activity, speculation, and material desires among the Saints, as well as among church leaders. While an attempt was made to keep their arrival quiet — there was no newspaper as yet to publish the news — word soon spread. The Saints began to clamor for permission to go to the gold fields. Even some of the Mormon apostles, such as George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson, were anxious to receive some gold to help pay their personal debts.\(^\text{29}\) Once again pressures began to build for a mass exodus, and once again Brigham Young vigorously denounced the spirit of rebellion, speculation, and seeking after the “god of this world.” But recognizing the continued need for gold, he laid plans which would forestall a mass exodus and at the same time secure the much needed gold to replace that leaving the territory to pay for imports. In addition he hoped to secure statehood for Utah.

**MORMON GOLD MISSIONARIES**

Charles C. Rich, who had been called as an apostle in the spring of 1849, had been commissioned to go to California with Amasa Lyman to assist in building the Kingdom there. His departure was postponed several times, and by early fall it appeared that his mission would be cancelled. However, in early September General John Wilson reached Salt Lake. Going to California ostensibly as an Indian agent, in actuality he was a special emissary of President Zachary Taylor with the mission of inducing Californians to petition Congress for statehood, rather than to be admitted as a territory. This would transfer the question of slavery in California from the President and the Congress to the new state legislature. Wilson worked out an arrangement with the church leaders whereby the Mormons would aid him in securing statehood for a combined Western and Eastern California, the latter consisting largely of present-day Nevada and Utah. It was also agreed that the plan would include a provision that Eastern California would be automatically separated as an autonomous state in January 1851.\(^\text{30}\)

Additional Mormon manpower would be needed in Western California if the plan was to succeed. Apparently Wilson and the church leaders were unaware that the California constitutional convention would end before Wilson and his Mormon allies could arrive. Not knowing of this problem and needing still more gold to counterbalance that leaving the area because of an otherwise negative balance of trade, at least four groups consisting of two

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\(^{28}\) John M. Letts, *California Illustrated, Including a Description of the Panama and Nicaragua Routes* (New York City: William Holdredge, 1856), pp. 95-96; Daily Transactions in Gold Dust, October 1, 1850.

\(^{29}\) Henry W. Bigler, Diary, Book B, January 12 and 14, 1850, Church Archives; George A. Smith and Ezra T. Benson to Amasa M. Lyman, November 11, 1849, Lyman Collection.

\(^{30}\) First Presidency to Amasa M. Lyman, September 6, 1849, Lyman Collection.
hundred to three hundred men were either sent or authorized to leave for California via the southern route that fall. No families have been identified among these groups. In the lead group was Apostle Charles C. Rich. The general guide was the experienced Captain Jefferson Hunt.

A number of the men in these parties were gold missionaries called by prominent men, including at least Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, the counselors to Brigham Young; apostles John Taylor, Parley P. Pratt, and George A. Smith; and Patriarch John Smith. The church president himself may well have called such personal missionaries. The gold missionaries were expected to tithe their gains and to share the remainder with their sponsors, some of whom apparently helped finance their trips to California.31

The vanguard of this unique group of missionaries was led by a southern convert, Captain James M. Flake, and left Salt Lake Valley on October 16, 1849. The trip was recorded by several of its members, including Henry W. Bigler, one of the co-discoverers of gold at Coloma, who was being sent back to the gold fields he had left the previous year. It also was recorded by George Q. Cannon, a future apostle and counselor to four church presidents, and by Elder Rich. Other Battalion veterans were in the company. Hunt’s disjointed large train included a large company of non-Mormons. Elements of the advance group were the first to discover gold near Salt Springs near the southern border of Death Valley. Included in this group was James S. Brown, another of the co-discoverers of gold at Coloma, who was bound for a proselyting mission in the South Pacific.32

The second group was led by the gentile Pomeroy brothers, with about one hundred wagons driven by Mormon drovers, some of whom were gold missionaries. It left Salt Lake on November 3. The third group was led by Simpson D. Huffaker and left the Valley on November 12. The last known group was led by Howard Egan and left the new fort in Utah Valley south of Salt Lake on November 18. It was evidently intended primarily as a commercial operation, being called the Salt Lake Trading Company.33

Arriving at the Williams Ranch in California’s southern settlements in December, the Flake company was joined by the Egan company which had evidently passed the other two groups. They then traveled northward along the El Camino Real, the road connecting the Catholic missions between San Diego and San Francisco. Just north of the Pueblo de Los Angeles they split up again, and Apostle Rich, taking a small group with him, headed for a hoped-for meeting with Apostle Lyman in San Francisco. Egan followed with the wagons, securing trade goods on credit at San Jose.

Failing to meet Lyman, who had gone south by ship, Rich rejoined Egan in the gold fields on the Merced River, where the latter had set up his trading

31Campbell, “The Gold Mining Mission of 1849,” pp. 19-31. The sponsors have been tentatively identified by me.
post. Some of the gold missionaries began to mine in the area and to the south at or near Mormon Bar in Mariposa County, apparently with little success. Others moved northward to the gold mines east and north of Sutter's Fort, where many became associated with the Brooklyn Saints and Battalion boys who had stayed over the winter. The latter were later joined by the discouraged miners from the southern mines.  

In the meantime, the Huffaker company and some of the Mormon boys in the Pomeroy train proceeded to the port of San Pedro, there taking various ships north to San Francisco. The two apostles finally met at the river port of Benicia as Lyman led Huffaker's men from San Francisco to Sutter's Fort and the gold fields and as Rich returned to San Francisco.  

The apostles spent the spring and summer of 1850 traveling between the southern mines and Slap Jack Bar in the north. Sometimes working separately, but generally together, they sought out the Saints, collecting tithes and offerings wherever possible. They spent much time laying plans for a settlement in the south, hopefully at the Williams Ranch east of Los Angeles. In addition they settled church commercial obligations with some of the accumulating gold.  

While gold mining may have been the dominant occupation of California's Mormon argonauts, there were as many as two dozen inns or taverns maintained by Mormons in El Dorado County and surrounding areas. Porter Rockwell himself maintained three of them in 1849-50. The most famous of the inns was known as the Mormon Tavern, situated on the Placerville road, about twenty miles west of Hangtown (Placerville). It was the frequent meeting place of Howard Egan, Porter Rockwell (who went under the alias of Brown), Charles C. Rich, and Amasa M. Lyman. Captain Asahel A. Lathrop was the proprietor. A captain often in 1847, it was he who had been the spiritual leader of the relief train to the southern settlements in the winter of 1847-48, returning to Utah with cattle and supplies. It is uncertain when he returned to the Land of Gold, but as he made substantial deposits to the gold accounts in December 1848 and January 1849, it would appear that he returned to California in the spring of 1849, possibly with Apostle Lyman.  

Jeremiah Root maintained an inn, the Six Mile House, about six miles east of Sacramento on the American River in the vicinity of Sutter's grist mill at Natoma, later Brighton. It was a favorite meeting place for Lyman and Rich despite the fact that Cannon, one of the gold missionaries, considered it a hotbed of apostates. The most pretentious hostelry was the City Hotel at Sacramento, built by Brannan and managed by John S. Fowler, a Mormon pioneer of 1847, who would later become Sacramento's second alcalde or mayor. In addition, Mormon Station (later Genoa) in Carson Valley, Nevada,

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34Lyman Diary, June 1, 1850.
35Charles C. Rich, Diary, April 1, 1850, Church Archives.
36These conclusions were reached after comparing the list of tentatively identified Mormons in the gold fields with the 1850 California census, which includes occupations.
37Daily Transactions in Gold Dust, December 12 and 15, 1848; January 12, 1849.
was maintained as a favorite stopping place on the Mormon Emigrant Road. Other Mormon-run hotels and taverns were scattered throughout the area.\(^{38}\)

By the fall of 1850 Mormons were also established as farmers, merchants, and craftsmen, while others were teamsters in the growing commerce between California and Deseret.\(^{39}\) Still others served as guides to California from Salt Lake as well as from the Missouri River.

There is no record of any proselyting activity among the Gentiles during this period. In fact, the apostles apparently had a policy of not holding religious services or even public prayer among the Saints in the gold fields. Their activities on Sundays appear to have been little different than those on the other days of the week.\(^{40}\)

In the spring of 1850, the last known authorized group of Mormons was sent to the California gold fields, under the leadership of William D. Huntington. The group consisted of miners, settlers, and proselyting missionaries, the latter primarily being sent to the Society Islands. Attached to the company were some Gentiles. Evidently many in this group went as settlers, some of them taking families and livestock with them. Upon arriving in California, the proselyting missionaries were helped by the California Saints to secure passage money for the islands. Some even mined gold for a short while before leaving for the islands. At least one of them, Uriah B. Powell, was lost to the gold fields. The remainder of the Huntington company spread throughout the area.\(^{41}\)

In addition to collecting tithes and offerings, Apostles Lyman and Rich counseled those who had failed to make major findings of gold to return to Utah with them. Apostle Lyman returned first, leaving the gold fields in July 1850 and arriving in Salt Lake about the end of September. Between October 1 and November 8, some $9,100 was deposited to the gold accounts.\(^{42}\)

Apostle Rich accompanied Lyman as far as Carson Valley, but returned to California to conduct church business. After returning he settled some church accounts and called the first group of proselyting missionaries to the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. Those called consisted largely of gold missionaries in the Flaxe company, who had been mining along the Middle Fork of the American River. One of these was George Q. Cannon, a former gold missionary at Slap Jack Bar on the Middle Fork of the American River. After becoming mission president in Hawaii, he would a short time later become the presiding authority in California and editor of the church's *Western Standard* in San Francisco.

Collecting more tithes and paying off church financial obligations, Rich left the gold fields in the first part of October, arriving in Salt Lake on November 11, 1850. He and others in his company brought with them at least

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\(^{38}\)This conclusion is based on the Rich and Lyman diaries. See my "California's Mormon Argonauts," chaps. 15 and 20; Miller, *Guide to Old Sacramento*, pp. 1-20.

\(^{39}\)See note 36.

\(^{40}\)Davies, "California's Mormon Argonauts," chap. 17.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., chap. 17; Simeon Dunn to Brigham Young, September 5, 1850, Church Archives.

\(^{42}\)Daily Transactions in Gold Dust, October 1, to November 8, 1850.
$11,870 in gold, which was deposited to Brigham Young's gold account through the remainder of the month.\textsuperscript{43}

While Lyman and Rich took a large number of the Saints to Utah with them in the summer and fall of 1850, most remained in California, many being identified in the U.S. census conducted during the fall and winter of 1850-51. They were concentrated in a number of towns, especially in El Dorado County: Pilot Hill, Louisville, Salmon Falls, Diamond Springs, Mud Springs, Placerville, and McDowell’s Hill being among the larger concentrations. Mormons constituted from 5 to 20 percent of the population of some of these towns.\textsuperscript{44}

By the spring of 1851, several hundred Mormon settlers led by Apostle Lyman were on their way to California via the southern route to help fulfill the dream of their file leader, Elder Lyman, to create Mormon settlements in the southern part of California. Many of these were from among the Mississippi Saints. Accompanying him was Elder Rich, perhaps to keep a rein on the sometime impetuous and independent senior apostle.

The large company did not have the enthusiastic support of Brigham Young. While he had given his blessings to a small expeditionary force, when he saw a thousand or so Saints gathered for the journey, he was disheartened, seeing them largely as escapees who had placed personal interests (including gold) ahead of those of the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{45}

The group established San Bernardino, with little if any financial help from Salt Lake. Attempting to meet the payments on the large Lugo Ranch they had purchased (having failed to secure the Williams Ranch), Lyman and Rich periodically went into the northern settlements, including the gold fields, to raise money from among the more successful Saints. Ebenezer Hanks, a well-to-do Mormon miner and merchant at Salmon Falls, became one of the principal financial backers, eventually moving to the south. San Bernardino also sent men on missions to prospect for gold in the Kern River country in central California. Their missions proved essentially abortive. In addition, missionaries were also eventually sent northward in 1855-56 to raise money among the scattered Mormon former gold miners. These missionaries reconverted backsliders and established several branches of the church. They also secured much needed funds from several of the more successful Saints. The San Bernardino missionaries were joined in 1856 and 1857 by other elders from Salt Lake and from the Pacific islands whose proselyting efforts were of a more general and traditional nature. They had few if any ties with San Bernardino and therefore were more likely to promote Salt Lake as the principal gathering place for the Saints.\textsuperscript{46}

In the fall of 1857, with the approach of Johnston’s Army, the Saints in the

\textsuperscript{43}Charles C. Rich, Diary, October 1 to November 11, 1850; Daily Transactions in Gold Dust, November 11-30, 1850.

\textsuperscript{44}See note 36.

\textsuperscript{45}Davies, “California’s Mormon Argonauts,” chap. 21.

\textsuperscript{46}See Frederick W. Hurst Diary, Lee Library, for an account of one of these. See also Davies, “California’s Mormon Argonauts,” chaps. 22-23.
far-flung Mormon colonies and groups, including those in the gold fields, were called home to Utah. A primary function of the California missionaries was to organize and lead them to Zion.47

However, many of the Saints remained in California after the church's call. Others went to Utah but returned to the Land of Sunshine after the emergency was over. Some of them may have stayed in or returned to California because of rebellion against polygamy and/or Brigham Young's forceful brand of leadership. Some became embarrassed by the Mountain Meadows massacre, Apostle Parley P. Pratt's murder in Arkansas, and Mormon resistance to the U.S. Army's occupation of Utah. Others may have found it difficult to liquidate farms and businesses on such short notice. Still others may have assumed that the church would soon return. It was not necessarily the lure of easy gold that kept them in California. In fact, the easy-to-get gold was gone.

Many might have remained faithful to Brigham Young and the Utah church had an official church presence been maintained in California after the emergency created by Johnston's Army was over. But California was abandoned by the church leaders, and California Mormons were left to wander in a spiritual Sinai for almost forty years without a Moses or even an Aaron to guide them. Substantial numbers of the Saints eventually became associated with the Reorganized Latter Day Saint movement of the late 1860s, under the leadership of Joseph Smith's eldest son, Joseph Smith III.48

**SUBJECT NEGLECTED BY HISTORIANS**

Mormon involvement in the gold fields provided the wherewithal to secure needed consumer and private investment goods not available in fledgling Deseret, as well as to serve other church purposes. Mormon way stations and inns in California not only enhanced the income of the Mormons, but also served as relief stations for missionaries and others. Commercial relationships were established and maintained in California which could continue to aid Utah's economic development. Large numbers of people were involved over a substantial period of time. But if the Mormon role in the California gold fields was so extensive and so important, why is it so little known?

The role has been neglected by Mormon historians probably as a result of an ambivalence created by the apparent public opposition of early Mormon leaders to the mining of precious metals, especially from 1849 to 1869. The actual encouragement of mining in 1848-50 was little known. The mining of gold in California came to be viewed by most Mormons as defiance of duly constituted authority. Just as failure to live the Word of Wisdom or lapses of the moral code frequently have been conveniently forgotten by later generations of Mormons, so it is that participation in the gold fields has often been covered up, downplayed or forgotten by Mormons, reducing the raw material with which later Mormon historians had to deal.

Non-Mormon historians have also neglected the Mormon role in the early

47 Davies, "California's Mormon Argonauts," chap. 23.
48 List of members in California, provided by Library-Archives, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, Missouri. Copy in my files.
development of mining. They too lacked the raw materials from which to create a historical narrative. The Mormons involved in the gold fields from 1848 to 1851 were basically transients involved but little in the public life of the communities they helped establish. Those who remained after the recall of the Mormons to Utah in 1857 generally left the faith. They often became embarrassed, not by gold mining activities, but by the membership of themselves and their parents in the Mormon church, which was coming into increasing disrepute in the gentile world. Such involvement was therefore also soon forgotten.

What evidence did exist was misread or neglected, perhaps because of the assumption that faithful Saints could not possibly have been involved beyond the initial discovery. Many assumed that Brigham Young was too powerful a leader to permit any significant post-discovery Mormon involvement, a conclusion belied by the facts.
The *Journal of Mormon History*, annual publication of the Mormon History Association, reflects the purposes of the association, “to foster scholarly research and publication in the field of Mormon history.”

Manuscripts dealing with all aspects of Mormon history are invited. First consideration will be given to those which make a strong contribution to knowledge through new interpretations or new information. A panel of readers will also consider general interest of the paper, extent and accuracy of research, and literary quality.

For matters of style, consult *A Manual of Style* (University of Chicago Press, 1969) and a recent issue of the *Journal*. Specific guidelines are available upon request from the editor.

Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Articles should be typed, double-spaced, with footnotes, also double-spaced, in a separate section at the end. Preferred length is fifteen to twenty-five pages, including footnotes.

Submit manuscripts to Richard W. Sadler, Department of History, Weber State College, Ogden, Utah 84403.
At the peak of his business career in the 1920s, Charles W. Nibley was not only a man of great wealth but of political and religious eminence also. His business dealings covered almost every western state and ranged from lumber and banking to sugar beets and railroads. Prior to his death in 1931, Nibley had been the presiding bishop of the Mormon church and then later second councilor to the church’s president, a noted philanthropist, and a civic leader. These achievements were remarkable considering his birth into a poor, lower class mining family in Hunterfield, Scotland. As if this were not enough to set him apart, Nibley also practiced polygamy, and it is this aspect of his life that I would like to deal with here.

The studies on polygamy in the past fifty years have increased in quantity and quality with not only professional historians getting involved but sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists as well. The result of this scrutiny has been a substantial increase in the knowledge available on the subject. But despite this growth of scholarly studies, historian Davis Bitton, in a review article on polygamy in 1977, could still write, "Much remains to be done to bring out the personal dimension of this experience." It is hoped that this article about Charles Nibley, who had three wives, will in some measure fill that need of a more personal, individual, and family account of polygamy.

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FIRST MARRIAGE

Nibley's first marriage took place in 1869 at the age of twenty to eighteen-year-old Rebecca Neibaur. Nibley lived in Brigham City at the time, operating a general store and hotel that he co-owned with Jewish convert Morris Rosenbaum. Interestingly, Morris had married Rebecca's older sister in 1858, and it was at the Rosenbaum's home that Rebecca boarded while working at the hotel where she met Nibley.

In 1866 Rosenbaum married again, giving both Charles and Rebecca an opportunity to see firsthand the lifestyle of a polygamous family. However, Charles's first contact with plural marriage came earlier from his own family in Wellsville. There four of Charles's five brothers and sisters entered into polygamy, all but one being performed prior to his.

The best quantitative evidence on polygamy indicates that ten to twenty percent of the Mormon families in Utah were polygamous, with Stanley Ivins stating that polygamy was a story of "sporadic outbursts of enthusiasm, followed by relapses, with the proportion of the Saints living in polygamy steadily falling." He concludes that polygamy was looked upon by the "rank and file as one of the onerous obligations of Church membership."²

If this was an onerous obligation for the majority of Mormons, then Nibley seems to have been an exception. In a letter to Rebecca, then living in Logan while Nibley was serving a mission in England, he writes about marriages in that city, "It is a good thing that Logan is redeeming its lost reputation in the marriage line, especially polygamous marriages. Now that the start has been made it will be easier for others to follow. People are like sheep — if one jumps the ditch or even into the ditch the whole herd is anxious to follow." Further on in this same letter Nibley comments to Rebecca, "One of my cousins — Mary Wilson — a very beautiful and accomplished young lady died when she was 17 only a few years since. When I get back I shall marry her after someone — you if you will — is baptized and received endowments for her."³

Nibley expressed his feelings about polygamy in another letter to some relatives in Scotland who were married while he labored in England. Nibley congratulates them and concludes, "So you see although I am not much married yet still I may be considerably more married in the time to come. After all one marriage is not such a huge affair."⁴

Such statements indicate a positive attitude toward polygamy which apparently was not accepted by the average Mormon male. But then Nibley was not average in any aspect of life, and, more importantly, neither were his

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³Charles Nibley to Rebecca Nibley, August 22, 1879, Charles W. Nibley Collection, Church Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. All correspondence with Nibley used in this article can be found in this collection. Mormons believe that properly performed marriages in their church are for time and all eternity. Therefore, Nibley's desire to marry his deceased cousin can be understood. However, I can find no evidence that this marriage ever took place.
⁴Charles Nibley to Thomas and Mary Wilson, November 4, 1878.
friends. Almost without exception, Nibley's close companions and associates were prominent businessmen, Mormon church officials, civic leaders, and polygamists such as Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, William Budge, William B. Preston, Marriner W. Merrill, and Henry J. Ballard. This polygamous environment created by friends, associates, and family no doubt influenced Nibley, while the prevailing attitude outside his circle would have carried little weight.

SECOND MARRIAGE

Nibley knew Ellen Ricks for at least four years prior to their marriage, while they were fellow employees at the local railroad station. However, the chances to have met in the small community even earlier would have been numerous. Interestingly, the day Nibley returned home from his mission to his first wife, Rebecca, and their two children, Ellen wrote in her journal, “May 5, Charlie returned home from his mission same day.”

Ellen, unlike Charles or Rebecca, had been raised in polygamy. Her mother, after losing her first husband, became the second wife of Joel Ricks, who with his two wives and children all lived in the same stone house in Logan. “Here we all lived as one family until I was married,” wrote Ellen. “I attended the district school in the winter and with father and mother spent the summers on the farm in Benson, here I grew up vigorous and strong learned to milk cows, make butter and cheese, drive, ride horse back and swim, and not till after I was a mother did I know what sickness was.” Ellen loved school and attended as much as she could, eventually becoming a teacher herself. Ellen also loved her Mormon faith, as the following entry in her journal indicates, March 30, 1879, “Today is my 23rd birthday. The Lord has greatly blessed me thus far, especially in giving me a testimony of the truth of His gospel.”

Ten months after his return from England, and on the eleventh anniversary of his marriage to Rebecca, Nibley married Ellen Ricks on her twenty-fourth birthday. Oddly, this day was Rebecca's twenty-ninth birthday as well. Nibley explains his step into polygamy this way: “At the time plural marriage was not only practiced but extensively taught... and the people who were able to comply with the law were urged to do so... So believing, I became engaged and a little later married Miss Ellen Ricks, who for nearly forty years now has been a most loyal and devoted wife and mother.”

Ellen’s only journal entry about the event makes this succinct statement: “Went to Salt Lake and received my endowments on the 25th of March in the Endowment House and was married to C. W. Nibley on Thursday, March 30.” Ellen wrote nothing of their courting nor of their engagement, but as Stephanie Goodson explains, “Courtship and marriage in the days of polygamy were anything but courtly.” The couple’s actions after the marriage adds weight to

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5Ellen Ricks Nibley, Journal, no page numbers, Church Archives.
6Ibid.
7Charles Nibley, Reminiscences (Salt Lake City: Published by the family, 1932), p. 81.
this interpretation. Nibley left Salt Lake City for Logan while Ellen spent a week in Centerville after which she went back to Salt Lake City to attend the jubilee conference of the Mormon church. Not until April 11, twelve days after the marriage, did Ellen return to Logan and to her new husband.

Nibley’s contemporary correspondence gives the same sense of pococurantism that emanates from Ellen’s journal. In almost daily letters written during these months, Nibley never mentions his coming marriage to even his closest friends. In a letter to Ellen, who was still in Salt Lake immediately following the wedding, he writes from Logan, “I am met on every hand with knowing looks and open congratulations.” However, Nibley concludes, “The nine day wonder will have died out before you return.” In this letter Nibley seems to confirm the conclusion of Charles Peterson that polygamous marriage ceremonies were, “silent, short, and undemonstrative.”

The two families lived in the same ward in Logan but about two blocks apart in nice frame homes of about equal size. Of their relationship, Nibley records, “Because of each member of the family trying to do his best and live as we should live, we had very little trouble indeed, but nearly always got along in a most pleasant and agreeable manner.” Taking away the years of the Raid, when the federal marshals made life miserable for any polygamist, I would agree with Nibley’s assessment. There were times of conflict, tension, and even disagreement, to be sure, throughout the life of the marriages, which ranged from sixty-one to forty-six years, but these things happen in monogamy as well. What makes marriages and most other social institutions succeed or fail is not necessarily found in the structure of the institution but in the make-up of the people involved; if they are basically compatible and accept the institution as correct, then the institution, whatever its external structure, has a good chance of success.

In the Nibley family, this seems to be the case.

Ellen Ricks fully accepted plural marriage as a divine institution, as did Nibley. She had been taught it and, more importantly, raised in it. To her it was not a novel practice but a natural and proper form of family life. Further, Ellen’s personality and character added to the chances of success. Early in her life she became inured to the responsibilities and challenges of pioneer life. For Ellen, plural marriage shattered few dreams; she knew the realities and accepted them with little complaint. That Ellen entered into plural marriage tells something about her acceptance of the principle. Ellen was an attractive, talented, and, for her time, a well

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9 Charles Nibley to Ellen Nibley, April 9, 1880.
12 Sir Richard Burton makes the following comments about Mormon women and polygamy: “For the attachment of the women of the Saints to the doctrine of plurality there are many reasons. The Mormon prophets have expanded all their arts upon this end, well-knowing that without hearty cooperation of mothers and wives, sisters and daughters, no institution can long live. They have bribed them with promises of Paradise — they have subjugated them with threats of annihilation.” Burton, *City of the Saints*, ed. Fawn M. Brodie (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 482.
educated person. She had been employed as a teacher and telegrapher and, therefore, had the means to support herself in the face of an unwanted proposal.

Preston, the second son of Charles and Ellen, depicts his parents in graphic terms that help explain the marriage relationship. In describing Charles, he pointed out the two real motivating forces in his father's life:

My father was also a very religious man. I can remember his family prayers in our little home in Logan and it seemed to me then as if he was talking to the Lord; he presented all his problems to his Heavenly Father in prayer and he worked with all his might to see that success came for him and his family. Father loved business and everything pertaining to it. He could scarcely wait until morning came so that he could go out and follow up his business and make money to support his family. It was the delight of his life to be able to furnish means for all of us.

In contrast to this, he portrays his mother in an entirely different manner, one that helps explain the compatibility of her marriage to Charles:

My mother, on the other hand, was very humble and willing only to live her life so that she could present a true account to her Maker and live her religion wholly and completely. Mother never had any ambition to be known, or to be pointed out as a particular person in the world. Her ambition was to be humble, prayerful, and quietly live her religion.13

Concerning Rebecca's attitude toward the marriage, an incident that occurred while Rebecca was still working at her brother-in-law's hotel (prior to her marriage) in Brigham City is instructive. Staying at the hotel was railroad magnate Leland Stanford, who had taken a liking to Rebecca. After discussing Mormonism and polygamy, Stanford asked Rebecca about the possibility of having a husband with several wives. Rebecca replied resolutely, "Sir, I would not marry a man who had not the courage of his own convictions, and who would not enter into the celestial order of marriage."14

The plural marriage must have started auspiciously, for one month after her marriage, Ellen wrote in her journal, "Tonight closes our quarterly conference, President John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, Joseph Smith, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Brigham Young, Jr., present, thanks to God for such peaceable times."

UNDERGROUND AND THIRD MARRIAGE

The peaceable times that Ellen enjoyed ended dramatically with the passage of the Edmunds Act in March of 1882. This new act gave the federal marshals the power they needed to prosecute polygamists. With this new law, the marshals began what has been called "The Raid," a decade of hunting, prosecuting, and incarcerating polygamists. Mormons reacted to this latest law in two ways: They initiated their last revival of plural marriages and they went "underground." Nibley went one step further. In protest of the bill's passage,

13 Taped interview with Preston Nibley, 1961, interviewer unknown, Church Archives.
he resigned from the office of Logan City alderman, a position he was elected to just ten days previous. Along with Nibley's resignation came that of three other aldermen and the city marshal. In a letter to a friend, Nibley explained his reasons for resignation:

I went to the house (the City Council I mean) having been notified to attend by the Marshal. . . . Fancy can best picture the thought likely to accompany a new aspiring Alderman—eager to distinguish himself. I went up to the . . . house. . . . Arriving there a few members present, I bowed in a dignified manner to the few and seated me to read the Herald. On the first page was the Edmunds Bill—it had passed! Fire flashed from my eye. Uttering a few cuss words with unusual emphasis. . . . The hon. Mayor whispered to myself and other Hon. members that we were likely (although he knew we were innocent—all innocent) to be suspected of certain misdemeanors as by law, in the said bill. . . . Ha! said I, suspected! Suspicion ever haunts the guilty mind. No longer will I serve a Government that suspects—I will resign; and so hastily writing and presenting a resignation my official career terminated.15

During the spring of 1885, the search for “polygs and cohabs” in Utah increased so that Charles moved Ellen and their son Preston from Logan to Paris, Idaho, where it seemed safer. “I remained here with my relatives, four months,” wrote Ellen, “to escape being disturbed by marshals or deputies who were expected at any time to make a raid upon all persons who were living in plural marriage in Logan.” Nibley also moved to Paris, but because of the fear that the marshal might catch him with Ellen, he lived in the home of Walter Hodge, with whom he soon began a business partnership in lumber.

While in Paris, Nibley met and became attracted to Julia Budge, who was the daughter of Nibley’s former mission president, William Budge, and who operated the town’s telegraph office. Julia was twelve years younger than Charles, eleven years younger than Rebecca, and five years younger than Ellen. In his Reminiscences, Charles explained the results of this encounter, “Notwithstanding the perilous times confronting polygamists or would-be polygamists, I had the hardihood and Miss Budge was not lacking in stamina to engage in Plural Marriage at that time.”16

By the summer of 1885, Charles was a polygamist with three wives. Rebecca lived in Logan with five children, and though not really immune from federal scrutiny, did not have to worry about the threat of federal marshals for she was the legal wife. But Ellen and Julia were in constant fear of being discovered and forced to be witnesses against their husband. During this period, Ellen gave birth to four children, two at her home in Logan and two while hiding in Idaho. Julia also gave birth to three of her five children away from home, one as far away as St. George. Ellen, the only wife who kept a journal, has many poignant entries that describe the life of a woman underground and the effect of it on her and her children. Below are a few examples:

[August 1885] Received a letter from Brother Nibley cautioning me to be very careful. I took my babe and went to Weston [in Idaho] where I met relatives, but my babe being sick and exposed to the hot sun in traveling brought on serious case of bowel trouble. My

16Nibley, Reminiscences, p. 85.
own health was much impaired under the strain and anxiety, my eyesight became so dim I felt some apprehension that I should lose my sight.

[June 1886] I remained here [Paris] until my babe was old enough that I might take the journey through the mountains, never can I remember being so homesick or of spending as lonely days as those last two months in Paris. I hired a man to drive me through the mountains . . . at the first sight of the Temple [Logan Temple] after emerging from the canyon I could not hold the tears back.

[December 1890] I remained until the middle of December here [mother’s house in Logan]. My little Edna was born October 15. I then decided to return to my home although at the time it seemed unsafe to do so. I remember how weak and downhearted I felt on returning to my home in the wintertime alone and three small children to care for. At the time my prospect for the future was dark, my husband had gone to Oregon where he could be safe and attend to business so as to maintain his family. The Lord blessed me with courage and hope and so I went on trusting in him, looking for better days.

[August 1891] I worried a great deal over my lonely situation until my health began to break down in spite of every effort to keep it up. I passed sleepless nights and in a few weeks I was obliged to lie upon the bed the greater part of the time until the next spring, when I began to gain in strength and began to get mastery over the situation that seemingly would have crushed me. I learned to find the sweetest comfort with my children, I read to them, played with them, prayed with them, worked with them, and sang to them.17

**Arrests**

Twice federal marshals arrested Nibley for unlawful cohabitation, once in 1885 and again in 1888. On November 13, 1885, while in Idaho, two Idaho marshals, Jules Bassett and Dave Wright, arrested Nibley. After looking at the warrant, Nibley protested the arrest, stating that the warrant had been issued to Marshal Ireland of the Territory of Utah and could only be served by him. Bassett retorted that he was powerless in the matter and was only doing what he was told.

At ten o’clock Monday morning, Charles’s preliminary hearing was held before U.S. Commissioner McKay in Salt Lake City. Charles and his attorney, Mr. Kirkpatrick, who had been retained by the church to handle these kinds of cases, decided to rest their defense at this preliminary hearing on the argument that the arrest had been illegal. As the hearing opened, Kirkpatrick questioned the legality of the arrest. The judge and the U.S. attorney looked at the warrant and agreed that the arrest had been illegal. The judge concluded, “I suppose this man will have a case of false imprisonment to bring against the United States Marshal of Idaho, but we will arrest him here.” Then just as he said that, he looked at his watch and, because of another pressing case, adjourned the hearing until two that afternoon.

The deputies and Judge McKay seemed to forget the importance of issuing a new warrant immediately, so Nibley quickly slipped out of the courtroom and down to the church historian’s office, which had become the de facto church headquarters, “to ask for advice as to the course I should pursue.”

17Ellen Ricks Nibley, Journal, unpaged.
Nibley found Franklin D. Richards. He told him of his release because of the illegal arrest and about the 2:00 p.m. hearing. To this Richards replied, "Brother Nibley, the Lord has delivered you out of their hands, don't you go back."

That night, Nibley stayed at a friend's home in Salt Lake City and then in the morning went on to Bountiful and then Ogden and hopped on a freight train to Paris.

During the Raid Mormons were extremely conscious of protecting polygamists, often making security so tight that not only was it difficult for the marshals to find those in hiding, but it was often difficult for Mormons to find other Mormons. Nibley makes this clear in the following incident after coming home to Logan shortly after his escape:

I found that Aunt Ellen had gone over to Millville to stay with some people there. I walked over one night and went to the home of Brother Sam Whitney. ... He took me to the Bishop's to find out where Mrs. Nibley was but the Bishop couldn't tell. He took me to first one house and then another, and searched through that town for hours trying to find where Aunt Ellen was and after being thoroughly tired in my attempt to find her, I had to trudge back home alone.

Seldom could Nibley make a trip to Logan to see his two families because of the federal marshals. On one occasion related in Reminiscences, Nibley revealed another insight in the life of a family living in fear of the federal marshals. During the winter of 1886-87, Nibley left Paris, where he and Julia were living together, for Logan to see his other two families.

By 1888 Charles had become a very successful businessman, and his surging financial strength allowed him to do more than just provide a comfortable standard of living for his families. It gave him power and influence unattainable to the average man, and he was not above using his influence when it could help him. A good example of this is the circumstances surrounding his second arrest for unlawful cohabitation in May 1888. In Reminiscences he explained it in these words:

By the year 1888 after the crusade had run for about three years it began to lose its power. On the trip when I went to Logan I got Brother Fred Turner to interview C. C. Goodwin who ... was then U.S. Commissioner for Cache County. I told Fred Turner to see what kind of a deal he could make with Goodwin and get me arrested and brought before his court and discharged. Turner reported back that it would cost me $150.00. I furnished the money; I was arrested; I was examined; I was discharged. The contract was carried out to the letter.18

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18 Nibley, Reminiscences, pp. 89-100. To save repetition in footnotes, the entire episode from this work is cited here.
FAMILY LIFE

What was it like to be a member of Charles Nibley's polygamous family? The citations already given from Ellen's journal explain several important aspects of her life. Because of Nibley's absenteeism, Ellen's displacement to her children greatly increased and they in turn identified more closely with her than Nibley. Ellen's life, as a result of polygamy, centered around her children and the church with virtually no outside involvement. And instead of the trials and hardships of the underground driving the wives out of the church that taught such a doctrine, it actually caused them to bury themselves more deeply in it. In the words of Charles Peterson, polygamy "rendered more complete the withdrawal of Mormon women from the world."19 Certainly for Ellen and Julia, this was true. Rebecca, however, seems to have been much less confined. This can be mainly explained as a result of her position as the first wife. From 1893 to 1900 Rebecca served as stake Relief Society president in Baker, Oregon, while Nibley served in the stake presidency. Then two years after Nibley became the presiding bishop, Rebecca received an appointment to the magazine finance committee of the General Board of the Relief Society.

An important element in the family life of the Nibleys that greatly aided the three mothers in the absence of Charles was the dominant influence of the Mormon church upon the children. Preston made the following comment regarding this fact, "My life centered around the Second Ward. We had Sunday school, deacons meetings, dances of all kinds, programs and that was our social life. It was all religious and connected with our church. My whole life was brought up under the influence of our Mormon religion."

The church institutions, then, provided an entire lifestyle for the Nibley children that virtually proscribed any significant influence from non-Mormon culture. As a result, polygamy seemed more natural and ordinary as Preston related in the following incident:

My brother Merrill [son of the first marriage] and I got a job from one of the circuses [that had come to town that summer] leading Shetland ponies up from the depot... to where the circus was to be held. On the way up there were two or three circus men.... One of them asked how old I was. I told him I was twelve. "How old is your brother?" "He's twelve too." "You're the same age?" I said, "No, he's two months older than I am." The man shook his head and said, "No, that can't be right. There's something wrong with that." I said, "No, that's right." The circus man then brought a buddy over and said, "I've got something for you to figure out. Here are two brothers and one says he is two months older than the other. How do you figure that out?" The other circus man said, "That's easy. We're in Mormon country now. What's the matter with you?" The circus men had a great laugh about this situation but Merrill and I couldn't understand it. As a matter of fact, everything seemed to be natural to us, for which I am grateful. I had three mothers and I loved every one of them. I would go to Aunt Becky's house and she would have me sit at the table and eat a meal, and then I would go home and I hardly knew which place I lived.20

19Peterson, Utah, p. 51.
20Preston Nibley interview. See also Kimball Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954), p. 241. Young, a sociologist, also concluded that as the children grew, "the church assumed more and more importance in their lives."
Concerning Julia's family, the best source is a brief journal kept by Annie Nibley Bullen, the second child of the marriage:

There were three branches to my father's family. . . . Since the families closest friends were also like ours, I was quite a grown girl before I realized that polygamy was not the universal pattern. There was, no doubt, hardships and tensions for our parents, but our family had such good times together that I was converted to polygamy until I was married myself.21

A little more detached appraisal of the family life was given by J. Eastman Hatch, a son-in-law, who stated that he and his wife, Florence, held the "bishop" in the highest regard, and that family life was most pleasant. He stated that because of the "bishop's" sense of fairness, there was seldom any feeling of jealousy. Eastman also emphasized another important aspect, i.e., the pecuniary accomplishments of Charles, as an important factor in the family's success. The Nibleys, according to Eastman, were the first to have the latest carriage, and, as time passed, home appliances and the first to have automobiles also.22

Though absent most of the time, as far as the second and third families were concerned, Charles still loomed as a significant factor in the family for two reasons. First, he provided substantial monetary support which gave each family financial security. Second, Charles's image as a dominant yet distant figure remained solidly in the minds of the children. This worked because of Charles's financial achievements, his high ecclesiastical positions, and his dominant personality. Preston stated this feeling of reverence in these words: "His word was law with me, both when I was a child and afterwards when I was married. We regarded him as king of our family and held him in the upmost veneration." Another example of this reverence is expressed in a letter written by Charles's son Alex during World War I. Alex wanted to be part of the war effort, but being forty years of age and with a family, the armed services was not an alternative. So Charles landed him a job with the War Industries Board where, in 1918, Alex wrote these lines:

I had a nice visit with Mr. Adams which proved that Shakespeare was wrong. There is something in a name. Mr. Adams said to his clerk, "Let Mr. Nibley have anything he asks for." Which proves that even away back here there is something magic in that name. It was not me, nor my position, but the name, and I have found all along, for many years, that the name Nibley is held in honor by the big men of the land whenever it is known. To me it has always been a magic password gaining admission for me to the offices of some very big and good men.23

Yet it was just such achievements accomplished by a gifted person who demanded the most of himself, together with his powerful personality and his long absences from home, that partially created problems in his relationship with some of his children. His son Nathan, whom Charles once classified as his hardest working son, wrote his father this telling letter in 1924:

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22 J. Eastman Hatch, taped interview, March 16, 1976, in possession of author.
23 Alex Nibley to Charles Nibley, June 19, 1918.
I realize Father that my success would give you much satisfaction and also then to make you have more confidence in my ability. It has always been evident to me that you have had very little, or no confidence in me whatsoever. That is in my ability to do things. I too believe that you could have helped me greatly with criticism, council and advice, but for some reason you have never, counseled with me, or even had a good heart to heart talk. I have regretted the fact that, you and I, have never been closer to each other. For I have missed something valuable and it has been my loss. But then, I have received so much from you in the way of example that I don’t want you dear Father, to think, for one minute, that I don’t love and revere you a great deal, for I do. In fact I am very proud of you and it affords me much satisfaction to be known as your son.

This distance between him and his children became problematic not only when he failed to give fatherly advice, as in the case of Nathan, but also when he did give it. Alex, who managed one of Charles’s businesses, complained that his criticisms were harsh and unfair. Alex explained this feeling in a 1916 letter to his father, “I read your letter... very eagerly and was in hopes I would find one kind word to me in it, but was disappointed... In times past you used to at least send me your love, but something seems to have changed and it is breaking my heart...” Then Alex concludes, “Treat me like any other employee that makes a mistake, but don’t treat me any worse.”

From 1890 to 1903 Nibley lived with his first family in Oregon, where he had joined forces with David Eccles in a highly successful lumber business. His departure from Logan left the second and third families with a weekend father permanently. During the summer months with school out, the older boys from the two Logan families would move to Oregon to work in the lumberyards and stay with Charles and Rebecca. These summer experiences gave the boys of the Logan families their only close contact with their father while they were growing up.

Besides lumber, Nibley became involved in the railroad business, which provided him free passage. He used this to come home on weekends to Logan as often as possible. His children remember walking the three-and-a-half blocks to the Logan station to meet him; he would usually have some small gift or surprise for each of them. Nibley would then spend a night at each home and then go back to Oregon Sunday night or Monday.

In 1903 Nibley left Oregon and moved to Salt Lake City, where in 1907 he became the presiding bishop for the Mormon church and then in 1926 a member of its First Presidency. For the rest of his life, he lived with Rebecca in Salt Lake City while the other two families remained in Logan.

With his wives and children, Nibley tried to compensate for his long absences by taking one child with him on each business trip and church assignment. This gave them a broad travel experience in the United States and Europe and allowed him to give his children the personal attention he felt important. All the Nibley children remember these trips as highlights in their childhood. According to Ruth Nibley Grant, a daughter, the “children would be really spoiled on these trips.”

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24 Nathan Nibley to Charles Nibley, June 2, 1924.
25 Alex Nibley to Charles Nibley, November 4, 1924.
Nibley also began early the practice of writing a birthday letter to each of his children and expressing his love and admiration for each child, giving some fatherly advice, and enclosing a dollar bill for each year of the child’s age. This practice became so popular with the children that they insisted it be expanded on to the grandchildren, and this Nibley did until his death.

Charles also strived diligently to be fair with his family. In regards to his wealth, he established the Nibley Company in 1913. Into this company he placed most of his stock assets and in turn gave one share of the company to each of the children and wives. This company acted as a holding company for Charles’s various stocks and gave each child and wife an equal share in his wealth.

The stockholders’ annual meetings for the Nibley Company were held at the Hotel Utah. The meetings would begin with a church hymn, prayer, and the sacrament, followed by the business meeting and concluded by a sumptuous meal of which the following is an example: grapefruit cocktail, crackers, celery, and olives, lobster newberg, filet mignon, potatoes au gratin, cauliflower hollandaise, rolls and butter, and finally, ice cream and cake.

In 1921 the Nibley Company decided (at the suggestion of the company’s president, Charles Nibley) to distribute to each stockholder ten thousand shares of U and I Sugar stock. The face value of the stock was $100,000, though the market value at the time was less than half that, since the company was in the midst of a depression. Charles advised his family to put the stock away and in a few years the company stock would give each family member an income of about eight thousand dollars a year which would, according to Charles, “make each one of you really independent for life.”

**THE CHILDREN**

Seventeen (nine males and eight females) of the twenty-four children born to Charles and his wives reached maturity. Below are two charts showing various aspects of the families:

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<th>Marriage Statistics</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age of</strong></td>
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<td>Husband</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st Marriage Rebecca</td>
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<td>2nd Marriage Ellen</td>
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<td>3rd Marriage Julia</td>
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<th>Fertility Statistics</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>No. of Births</strong></td>
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<td>Rebecca</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
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26Charles Nibley to Julia Nibley, June 9, 1921. Unfortunately for the children, Nibley was sadly mistaken about the anticipated recovery of the sugar stock. Both the twenties and the thirties were difficult decades for the sugar beet company.
These figures are very close to quantitative studies on polygamy, indicating that the Nibley family was not unusual in this area. The ages at which Rebecca, Ellen, and Julia stopped having children, 39, 43, and 44, also fit the norm for their positions in the family.27

Eight of Nibley’s nine sons went on LDS missions and two sons (Alex and Preston) later served another time as mission presidents. Fifteen of his seventeen children were married in an LDS temple. However, for the majority of his children, church activity ended here. Of the seventeen children and their families, only three showed significant church activity later in life, while two more manifested moderate church involvement. The majority (twelve) showed little to no church activity. As a result only one-fourth of the grandchildren are today involved in the church. Among these grandchildren (who number 54), however, there seems to be a rather high ratio of educational and economic success. Many are doctors, lawyers, professors, and musicians, as well as bank and corporation presidents. As with the children, nowhere is there any feeling of inferiority or second-class standing. They are all proud of their grandfather and of their heritage.

Six divorces mark the seventeen marriages of Nibley’s children. Four of these divorces happened in Julia’s family of five children. Four of the eight daughters’ marriages ended in divorce, while only two of the nine sons’ marriages so ended. The high incidence (50 percent) of divorce among the daughters may be attributed to the special relationship they had with their father. Nibley treated his daughters so well when at home (and yet was not home enough for the daughters to develop a more realistic picture of the father-husband position) that when married they were unable to cope with a more normal situation. Each of the sons attended college, though only two graduated. Those two, Joel and James, went on to become an attorney and physician, respectively. Six of the eight daughters attended college, but only Annie graduated, her field being home economics.

Most of Nibley’s sons went into one of his businesses or into their own with their father’s backing. None of them attained the success of their father though most seem to have been reasonably successful.

Neither Nibley nor his wealth survived the Great Depression, and the adjustment from affluence to the more ordinary standard of living was difficult for most of the children. One grandson explained that the depression years were especially difficult for his father, Joel, and on one occasion he told his son, “You were fortunate. You weren’t born the son of a rich man.”28

CONCLUSION

What can be said of Charles Nibley and his families’ experience with polygamy? First, Nibley’s decision to enter polygamy was, no doubt, influenced by a number of factors, including family, friends, and a real belief in the principle. The same can be said of Ellen and Julia, who were themselves products of polygamy. But even beyond this, Charles Nibley simply liked the


institution. To him it was not only divine but enjoyable; not an "onerous obligation" but a pleasant responsibility. As late as the summer of 1890, he still considered taking another wife, but the church had ceased performing any more plural marriages. Besides, the church leadership felt that Nibley had "sufficiently complied" with the law. Three months later, the church issued the Manifesto.

Second, though the post-Manifesto period eliminated the fear and anxiety created by the Raid and permitted a more stable lifestyle for Nibley and his families, in many ways Nibley's family relationship changed very little with the announcement of the Manifesto. He continued to support each family, but lived only with the first. However, both Ellen and Julia bore him children after the Manifesto, though admittedly at some risk.

Third, Nibley's great financial stature, his prominent church positions, and his civic popularity created a tremendous respect for him among his children. This veneration, which was not balanced by familiarity with the very human side of Nibley because of his long absences from the homes, created a gap with his children that was seldom bridged. The children did not have a father as much as they had an image.

Last, and probably the main conclusion, is that Nibley's experience with polygamy was relatively positive. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Most important is the belief in the divinity of the principle by Nibley and his wives. Next in importance is the fact that Nibley worked assiduously to be fair and impartial in his love and support for his families. Mormon church President Heber J. Grant agreed that Nibley's skills as a husband were worth mentioning. In a 1925 letter, Grant congratulated him on "the very splendid wives you have and above all do I congratulate you in having retained their perfect love, confidence and esteem which is no small thing in my judgment. I know something of what I am saying," concluded Grant, who also had three wives, "because a man with more than one wife has to be a pretty good fellow to retain their love and confidence."29

The final factors accounting for the success of the families was Nibley's financial support and the support of the Mormon church, which offered spiritual, cultural, physical, and intellectual outlets through church-related programs.

Life, then, in Nibley's polygamous families, on the whole seems to have been (outside of the period of the Raid) relatively happy, stable, and secure. But as Annie Nibley Bullen told her daughter, "No matter how good it was, there were some pretty lonely times."30

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29Heber J. Grant to Charles Nibley, 1925.

30Interview with Mrs. Stringham Cannon, August 10, 1980, notes in possession of author. Mrs. Cannon is a step-daughter of Annie Nibley Bullen.
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