Journal of Mormon History

Volume 39
Issue 2 spring 2013

3-24-2013

Journal of Mormon History, Vol 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013)

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/mormonhistory

Part of the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/mormonhistory/vol39/iss2/2

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Mormon History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.
# Journal of Mormon History, Vol 39, no. 2 (Spring 2013)

## Table of Contents

### PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
--Mr. Samuelsen Goes to Copenhagen: The First Mormon Member of a National Parliament, *Richard L. Jensen*, 1

### TANNER LECTURE
--The Latter-day Saints, the Doughnut, and Post-Christian Canada, *David B. Marshall*, 35

### ARTICLES
--Minding the House of Church History: Reflections of a Church Historian at the End of His Time, *Marlin K. Jensen*, 78
--Community of Christ’s Evolving Approach to Mission, *Steven L. Shields*, 139

### REVIEWS
--Brant A. Gardner. The Gift and the Power: Translating the Book of Mormon, *Grant Hardy*, 258

### BOOK NOTICES
--Douglas J. Bell. Defender’s of the Faith: The Book of Mormon from a Soldier’s Perspective, 274
--Mike Mcpheters. Agent Bishop: True Stories of an FBI Agent Moonlighting as a Mormon Bishop, 277
--David Beagley. One Lost Boy: His Escape from Polygamy, 278

This full issue is available in *Journal of Mormon History*: [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/mormonhistory/vol39/iss2/](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/mormonhistory/vol39/iss2/)

CORRECTION: The photograph illustrating Justin R. Bray, “The Lord’s Supper during the Progressive Era, 1890–1930,” Journal of Mormon History 38, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 91, is courtesy of the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, and the portrait on p. 96 is courtesy of the Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

The Mormon History Association

The Mormon History Association [www.mormonhistoryassociation.org] is an independent nonprofit 501(c)3 organization devoted to all aspects of the Mormon past. It strives to be the preeminent catalyst and forum worldwide for encouraging the scholarly study of Mormon history. It pursues its mission by sponsoring annual conferences; encouraging the highest quality research and publication; and awarding book, article, and other prizes. Its official periodical, the Journal of Mormon History, fosters the publication of independent, scholarly research. Membership in the association is open to all.


Copies of articles may be made for teaching and for research purposes free of charge and without securing permission, as permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law. For other uses, permission must be obtained from the author(s).

All statements of opinion are the authors’ own and not necessarily those of the Mormon History Association, its officers, directors, editors, and/or members. Authors alone are responsible for the factual accuracy of their articles, including quotations, citations, and all other uses of source materials.

Articles are abstracted and indexed in Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life, published by ABC-CLIO. This periodical is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database® (ATLA RDB®) and is also included in the full-text ATLA Serials® (ATLAS®) collection. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606; email: atla@atla.com; http://www.atla.com.

Mormon History Association annual dues are: regular, $60; spouse/partner, $70; student, $30; digital-only (U.S. and international), $25; institution, $80; sustaining, $125; patron, $250; and donor, $500. For subscriptions outside the United States, DVDs of back issues, individual back issues, and all questions, see www.mormonhistoryassociation.org or contact (801) 521–6565. Digital copies of back issues are available at EBSCO and http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/mormonhistory.

Members are asked to notify the association immediately if they change their membership mailing address, including their email address.
Manuscripts dealing with any aspect of the Mormon past are welcome. Primary consideration is given to manuscripts that make a strong contribution through new interpretations and/or new information. Acceptance is based on originality, literary quality, accuracy, and relevance. Reprints and simultaneous submissions are not accepted.

Submissions should be sent to mormonjournal.taysom1@gmail.com in Word. The author's name and contact information should be separate from the manuscript. All illustrative materials, including maps, charts, tables, and graphs, should be attached in a separate file and not embedded in the electronic document. All such illustrative materials must be supplied by the author.

The Journal's style guide is available at www.mormonhistoryassociation.org. The peer-reviewed evaluation process usually takes three to six months.
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
Mr. Samuelsen Goes to Copenhagen: The First Mormon Member of a National Parliament
Richard L. Jensen 1

TANNER LECTURE
The Latter-day Saints, the Doughnut, and Post-Christian Canada
David B. Marshall 35

ARTICLES
Minding the House of Church History: Reflections of a Church Historian at the End of His Time
Marlin K. Jensen 78

Writing an Honorable Remembrance: Nineteenth-Century LDS Women’s Autobiography
Katherine Sarah Massoth 91

Community of Christ’s Evolving Approach to Mission
Steven L. Shields 139

“A Negro Preacher”: The Worlds of Elijah Ables
Russell W. Stevenson 165

REVIEWS
Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whittaker, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds.
Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844
Brett D. Dowdle and Samuel Morris Brown 255
Brant A. Gardner. *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*  
*Grant Hardy* 258

J. Spencer Fluhman. “*A Peculiar People*”:  
*Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America*  
*Benjamin E. Park* 264

Reid L. Neilson. *Early Mormon Missionaries in Japan, 1901–1924*  
*Ronald E. Bartholomew* 267

**BOOK NOTICES**

Douglas J. Bell. *Defenders of Faith: The Book of Mormon from a Soldier’s Perspective* 274


Mike Mcpheters. *Agent Bishop: True Stories from an FBI Agent Moonlighting as a Mormon Bishop* 277

David Beagley. *One Lost Boy: His Escape from Polygamy* 278
PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

MR. SAMUELSSEN GOES TO COPENHAGEN:
THE FIRST MORMON MEMBER OF A
NATIONAL PARLIAMENT

Richard L. Jensen

May 20, 1913, ELECTION DAY, was a time of jubilation for Frederik Ferdinand Samuelsen. Running for reelection to the Folketing, the lower house of the Rigsdag, Denmark’s parliament, against three other candidates to represent the Århus South district, he had won handily, with 54 percent of the total vote—nearly twice that of his nearest competitor. With his twenty-year-old daughter, Ella, and a group of her friends, he walked to the union hall to announce the preliminary results. “There was tremendous enthusiasm,” he reported in his diary. “The people shouted with joy, such that I could hardly get an opportunity to speak; and when I stepped down from the speaker’s stand they wanted to carry me. Ella was deeply moved.”1

Samuelsen wrote that he was surprised that he had done so
well—as well he should have been, given the circumstances. For one thing, it was widely known that he was a Latter-day Saint, a member of a tiny religious minority that had recently attracted waves of negative publicity. Beginning two years earlier, Europe had been treated to a barrage of accusations against the Mormons in a variety of media. In 1911 a Danish company, Nordisk Film, released a major silent movie, *Mormonens Offer* (A Victim of the Mormons), that quickly became an international box office hit.\(^2\) In the English-language version, the villain, an American named Andrew Larson, played by the popular actor Valdemar Psilander, wins the attractive young Florence Grange (actress Clara Pontoppidan) away from her fiancé, smuggles her on board a steamer bound for America, takes her to Utah to become his plural wife, and locks her in a bedroom. Andrew’s first wife sympathizes with Florence. The plot thickens as Florence’s fiancé and her brother sail for America. You get the general idea. Attempts by the LDS Church and the governor of Utah to prevent the showing of the movie apparently contributed to its popularity.\(^3\)

The release of *Mormonens Offer* came during a time when considerable attention was focused internationally on the problem of what was then called the white-slave trade, human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Inspired by the work of English feminist Josephine Butler and others, an international movement emerged in the early twentieth century that included the Danish Committee for the Pre-

---

\(^{2}\)A fourteen-page brochure advertising the film, printed in Århus, trumpeted: “This exciting and effective contemporary play, which illuminates the ruthless propaganda unleashed by ‘the Latter-day Saints,’ is one of the great worldwide successes of the art of filmmaking.” *Mormonens offer: et drama om kærlighed og sekters'k fanatisme* (Victim of the Mormon: A Drama about Love and Sectarian Fanaticism) (Århus: Reklametrykkeriet Busch & Petersen [1912?]). A copy at the LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, bears a notation in English: “This is a play [sic] that has been showing in picture shows here in Norway for sometime.”

Frederik Ferdinand Samuelsen, ca. 1919, shortly before emigrating to Utah. Photographer: Skabelund. Courtesy LDS Church History Library.
The chairman of the committee, Col. Axel Liljefalk, claimed that the Mormons were transporting hundreds of young Danish women to America as white slaves and implied that this nefarious plot (never proved) was connected with the disappearance of many young women in Chicago (December 2, 1913).

Similar claims—but about the recruitment of young women as polygamous wives—were made by a professional anti-Mormon lec-

---


5In his 1911 book Den Hvide Slavehandel (The White Slave Trade) (Copenhagen: E. Jespersens Forlag, 1911), Liljefalk noted “special investigations” undertaken by immigration authorities in a dozen cities in the
turer, a former Latter-day Saint named Hans Peter Freece from Salina, Utah, in Denmark and in England, in the English language in both countries. In a series of letters that he signed as a member of the Rigsdag, Samuelsen challenged Col. Liljefalk to produce any evidence for his claims about the Mormons but did not receive a straightforward response (December 2, 1913).

Prominent among numerous Danish Lutheran clergymen who published and lectured against the Latter-day Saints was H. O. Frimodt-Møller, a parish priest in Samuelsen’s own city of Århus. Mormon missionaries were understandably attacked more aggressively than other missionaries, he wrote, given their alleged doctrines of blood atonement and polygamy, their duplicity, and their attempts to portray themselves as Christians when in fact they were not.

Having read in a newspaper that Denmark’s Minister of Culture, who was also the Minister for Ecclesiastical Affairs, was exploring the possibility of working in concert with the Swedish and Norwegian governments to expel LDS missionaries from their respective countries, Samuelsen inquired in a speech before the Folketing in October 1912 whether the minister, Jacob Appel, indeed had such intentions to “take part in the diminution of the already very limited freedom of religion of the non-recognized religious societies.”

The establishment of freedom of religion through Denmark’s constitution of 1849 had made it possible for the Latter-day Saints to proselytize and to flourish, even though Mormonism was controversial. Yet as recently as 1900 small numbers of Latter-day Saint missionaries had occasionally been banished from Denmark. The deportations had been carried out swiftly, apparently by local authorities, largely based on complaints by clergy of the established church. This

United States, including Salt Lake City and Ogden, Utah. He may have confined his charges regarding systematic recruitment by the Latter-day Saints to his verbal presentations.


piecemeal action against perceived Mormon troublemakers was apparently facilitated by earlier reactions to another controversial movement. Missionaries were given to understand that an 1875 law regarding aliens, adopted during a volatile period of Socialist agitation, provided the legal basis for such action. Louis Pio, Povl Geleff, and Harald Brix, founders of the Socialist movement in Denmark, all served extended prison terms in the 1870s, after which Pio and Geleff emigrated to the United States and Brix died five months after his release.

---


9 E. Wiinblad and Alsing Andersen, *Det Danske Socialdemokratis Historie fra 1871 til 1921* (The History of Danish Social Democracy from 1871 to 1921) (København: Socialdemokratiets Forlag *Fremad*, 1921), 19–53.
tion seems to have left its mark on Danish law.

But occasional deportations had not posed nearly as great a threat to Latter-day Saint proselytizing as joint action by Scandinavian governments might. In his speech in the Folketing, Samuelsen pointed out that the ratio of clergy in the Lutheran state church to Mormon missionaries was about twenty-two to one and that Lutheran pastors were learned men in a position of power, while Mormon missionaries were ordinary laborers and shopkeepers who had not studied theology. He suggested that, if the Lutheran clergy from such an advantageous position could not prove that the teachings of the Mormons were false, the honorable minister should not “speculate in that kind of restrictions of freedom in the realm of religion whereby Denmark would sink into the second rank of civilized countries.” Samuelsen declared, “I have belonged to this church for about 20 years. I know these men, and I know that they are honorable, honest, and sincere men.”

“This speech,” Samuelsen wrote later, “attracted widespread attention and appeared in all the newspapers of the country, and . . . the most fanatical papers wrote that this could [not] be tolerated in the Danish Rigsdag, and that I was unworthy to represent Arhus” (May 20, 1913). The minister of culture responded that neither his ministry nor, as far as he knew, any other ministry “has entered into any negotiation with our neighboring countries on the question at hand.”

How, then, could a person known to be a Latter-day Saint—a member of this much-maligned church—be elected to the Danish parliament in the first place, in 1906, and how did he add to the number of votes he received in 1913 as compared with the previous election?

Socialism and Mormonism coexisted in the lives of many Latter-day Saints in Samuelsen’s day. In an earlier generation, Louis Bertrand as a journalist and activist in France and Plotino Rhodakanaty as an ideologue, educator, and activist in Mexico, made noteworthy contributions to the Socialist movement. Many Latter-day Saints in Utah were Socialists when the movement reached its point of

---

11Folketingste Forhandlinger, 1912–13, col. 777, October 23, 1913.
greatest influence there around 1911–13. During this period, F. F. Samuelsen was one of the many individuals at the grassroots level who made socialism an increasingly formidable factor in local and national government in Europe in the early twentieth century and whose colleagues and successors in Social Democratic parties governed Denmark and other countries for a substantial part of the rest of that century.

Samuelsen’s life provides an important opportunity to view the conjunction of Mormonism, organized labor, and European Socialism, a world inhabited at the time by many European Latter-day Saints, well beyond the Mormon culture region in the U.S. Intermountain West.

Samuelsen was born in Copenhagen in 1865. His father died when he was nine, and he was employed at a local match factory, along with his sister and brother, at age ten, while attending primary school (July 1, 1901). He wrote later that, because he recognized the necessity of work at that early age, “I have always had a desire to work” (April 28, 1906). At age sixteen, he was apprenticed, first briefly to a blacksmith and then to a locksmith. For his final project as an apprentice, he won a silver medal and a stipend that enabled him to travel abroad in pursuing his trade. At some point, he served for sixteen months in the military, after which he showed an aversion to uniformed military officers (December 11, 1915).

Evrard, 2005); Carlos Illades, Rhodakanaty y la formación del pensamiento socialista en México (Rhodakanaty and the Formulation of Socialist Thought in Mexico) (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa, 2002).


14“Sølvbryllup” (Silver Wedding Anniversary), Værksteds-Tidende (The Workshop Times), 1915, 75, clipping enclosed in F. F. Samuelsen diary, misplaced in pages for March 1918. Steven W. Harris, “Biographical Sketch of Frederik Ferdinand Samuelsen and Mariana Marie Florentine Jensen on the 100th Anniversary of Their Baptism into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on December 21, 1892,” 3, photocopy of manuscript in my possession.
He obtained work as a machinist at a sewing machine factory in Århus, Denmark’s second-largest city, in 1889. According to the 1890 census, the population of Århus was 33,306 in 1890—77,949 including the nearby countryside. By comparison, Copenhagen had a population of 312,839, and Denmark’s population numbered 2,172,380.15 
In 1890 Samuelsen married his first cousin, Marie Jensen, the daughter of his mother’s sister, at the Lutheran cathedral in her home town, Roskilde, some fifty kilometers west of Copenhagen.16 They were both twenty-five, and their daughter Julia was born later that year. Marie’s younger sister, Vilhelmine, also moved to Århus, where she met Peter Christiansen, who had become a Latter-day Saint in January 1891 at age twenty-nine. Peter baptized twenty-two-year-old Vilhelmine as a Mormon in July 1892, and they were married later that year.17 In December 1892, Frederik and Marie were also baptized.18 Samuelsen was ordained an elder in July 1893.19

Samuelsen’s diary, begun the year after his baptism, outlines the rhythms of his life, featuring long, often boring hours at work, the delights of visiting friends and relatives, meals at home and while visiting friends, outings to the nearby woods, walks along the beach, and usually diligent participation in Church meetings and other activities. Samuelsen’s employer at the sewing machine factory tried to require the workers to arrive promptly at 5:55 A.M. and to return from lunch by 1:25 P.M. (July 22, 1895). Samuelsen worked six days a week, often until 8:00 P.M., and on Sundays if necessary. Still, Samuelsen managed to attend union meetings and political gatherings—often on Sundays—that included listening to public readings at the labor union hall from the writings of Karl Marx, or excerpts from Henrik Ibsen’s Doll House, or listening to a former pastor attacking “modern Christendom and the

16Harris, “Biographical Sketch of Frederik Ferdinand Samuelsen and Mariana Marie Florentine Jensen,” 4.
17Århus Branch, Scandinavian Mission, Records of Members, entries for Peter S. Christiansen and Vilhelmine Jacobine Jensen, LR 10451, LDS Church History Library; Jenson, History of the Scandinavian Mission, 493.
18Århus Branch, Records of Members, entries for Frederik Ferdinand Samuelsen and Marie Florentine J. Samuelsen.
19Ibid.
state church” (February 28, 1897; January 20, 1895).20

He also attended an array of Church meetings. In 1894 he was appointed second counselor in the Sunday School, an organization that seems to have been largely for young people (July 28, 1894). There were local Church meetings Sundays at 2:00 and 8:00 PM, and on Thursday evenings. Priesthood meetings were held on some Saturday nights. On Mondays were meetings of the Young Men, of which Samuelsen was president from February 1896 to October 1906 (January 1, 1901). His diary shows only occasional lapses in religious observance; one Sunday, he recorded, he and Marie decided they had had an “overabundance of spiritual meetings” and went to the theater instead of church (April 6, 1913). But the depth of their commitment to Mormonism is clearly evident. They named their first son Wilford, possibly in honor of Wilford Woodruff, then Church president. Samuelsen’s diary records when he blessed the sacrament and when he fasted.

For about two decades, beginning with the arrival of the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in Denmark in 1850, local converts played a crucial role in proselytizing, pastoral work, and Church administration. The few missionaries who came from America could hardly begin to keep up with preaching opportunities, so that work was carried out by Danish converts, many of whom devoted years of their lives full-time to Church service before emigrating to America. For their subsistence they relied on the hospitality of Church members, friends, and strangers; on gifts and donations; and sometimes on tithing funds, when authorized to do so.21 As dozens of congregations sprang up, local people were called to leadership. In the decades that followed, the number of local congregations diminished due primarily to emigration and secondarily to departures from the faith, leading to a consolidation of Church units. From a high of 3,450 members in 101 branches in 1861 (organized into nine “conferences” or districts), by 1892 Denmark had 1,085 members in fourteen branches in

---

20Uffe Birkedal (1852–1931) left his post as a priest in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Denmark’s official religion, in 1893 and was the priest for the Free Church Society, Denmark’s first Unitarian congregation, 1900–1918, http://unitarerne.dk/3/3.html (accessed November 29, 2012).

three conferences. Even as the number of congregations—and thus the number of local administrative positions—decreased, the number of missionaries from abroad increased substantially. After establishing themselves in the American West, many of the early converts returned to Denmark as full-time missionaries; and in time, their American-born sons followed. Thus, by the decades around the turn of the century, “missionaries from Zion,” as they were called, were far more numerous than in the 1850s and 1860s and did most of the proselytizing while also presiding over branches and conferences. Local Church members could thus devote full-time effort to earning a livelihood and providing Church service in some of the waking hours that remained.

In 1892, the Århus Conference had five congregations with a total of 318 members including children. The conference president in Århus usually ranged in age from his twenties to middle age and occasionally older, was either a native of Denmark or a son of Danish parents, was married, and was from Utah or Idaho. He usually served concurrently as president of the Århus Branch, while also supervising the proselytizing and pastoral activities of other missionaries in the conference. During the twenty-six and a half years that Frederik and Marie were Latter-day Saints in Denmark, twenty-seven missionaries from America served as conference presidents in Århus and twenty-seven served as branch presidents. Because of overlapping assignments, they comprised a total of thirty-six individuals. Additionally, during these years, an average of about twenty proselytizing missionaries served concurrently in the Århus Conference. Supportive local


23The average number of LDS missionaries from the United States serving in Denmark for the two decades 1890–1909 (55.25) was eleven times as high as the average number for 1850–69 (5.25). Compiled from Jenson, History of the Scandinavian Mission, 534.

24“Statistisk Rapport over Jesu Kristi Kirke af Sidste-Dages Hellige i Skandinavien for Aaret 1892 (Statistical Report for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Scandinavia for 1892),” Skandinaviens Stjerne 42 (1892–93): 96. The Copenhagen conference had six congregations with 469 members; the Ålborg Conference had three branches with 298.

25Jørn Holm Bendtsen, ed., Århus Menigheds Historie (History of Århus Congregation) (Århus: Århus Menighed, 2007), 39–41; Jenson, His-
Saints like the Samuelsens provided hospitality to hundreds of these individuals, serving them thousands of meals and other refreshments and sometimes housing visiting authorities from Copenhagen.

Frederik and Marie also rendered Church service. Marie was actively involved with “the Sister Association,” meaning the Relief Society, for several years as its president in Århus. When he was available, Samuelsen took care of the children so she could attend its evening meetings (August 23, 1896). He presided over the Young Men’s organization for twelve years, from 1894 until he was elected to the Rigsdag in 1906. His brother-in-law, Peter Christiansen, was president of Århus’s Sunday School for twenty years (September 8, 1913), and Peter’s wife, Vilhelmine, also served for a time as Relief Society president.26

The frequent turnover of missionary leaders meant that the Danish members of the Århus Branch dealt repeatedly with variations in leadership style and different points of view. While Samuelsen’s relationships with these leaders were generally warm and cordial, he was occasionally frank about developments that he considered to be problematic. On one occasion in 1896, at a Sunday evening church service, a Church member made disparaging comments about labor unions; and before Samuelsen offered the benediction, he took the opportunity to “correct” the speaker (June 21, 1896). Three years later, a week after the beginning of a major nationwide lockout by the Danish national employers’ association that would last a hundred days, Danish-born American missionary Andrew Petersen, president of the Århus Branch and conference, complained in a Church meeting about labor unions (June 1, 1899). As presidents of the Young Men and the Sunday School respectively, Samuelsen and Christiansen participated in branch council meetings. Samuelsen reported few details about these proceedings; but at the next branch council meeting, Samuelsen took issue with Petersen, pointing out how important the labor movement in Denmark was for “the working class” (June 9, 1899). The following month, after a weekly Thursday evening church meeting, Petersen asked if anyone had objections about how he was conducting branch affairs. Samuelsen and Christiansen gave candid and apparently rather harsh feedback. “I criticized him for his conduct on many occasions,” confided Samuelsen in

26Jenson, History of the Scandinavian Mission, 493.
his diary. “It was an uncomfortable meeting” (July 20, 1899).

As an assigned “teacher,” Samuelsen regularly visited a number of Church members, gave them Church literature, counseled with them about their problems and concerns, and collected their tithes, which he forwarded to the branch president along with his own. He seems to have contributed somewhat more than half of the total amount he submitted.

While the missionaries from Zion maintained primary responsibility for proselytizing, local Church members sometimes organized to assist. When the Århus congregation set a goal of distributing ten thousand pieces of Mormon literature in 1894, Samuelsen distributed 1,895 in one month and reported that only 19 persons he met declined to receive any (March 25, 1894). He encouraged fellow Latter-day Saints not to neglect proselytizing people in the surrounding countryside and spent an entire cold, snowy Sunday doing exactly what he was advocating (February 23 and March 10, 1893).

The rituals of the dominant religion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, were a pervasive feature of the social lives of
Standing, left: Julia, Ella, and Frederik Samuelsen. Seated, left: Marie, Kaj, and Wilford. Photo taken October 8, 1909, courtesy LDS Church History Library.
communities and extended families. Latter-day Saints in Århus sometimes tried to turn back to Lutheranism for special occasions, letting their infants be baptized in the Lutheran Church and asking Lutheran clergy to conduct family funerals. Samuelsen condemned such halfway measures as hypocrisy and called upon the members of his local congregation to cease (April 4, 1915). He also warned one of the members of the congregation whom he visited regularly as a teacher that, if he continued to embrace spiritualism, he would be excommunicated (April 30, 1895).

Frederik and Marie had four children: Julia, born in 1890, Ella (1893), Wilford (1894), and Kaj (1899), in addition to son Ove Emil (1895), who died as an infant. Marie developed serious health problems by 1914 and was an early case of successful treatment with radiation therapy. Her situation was simultaneously the focus of fasting and prayer by Latter-day Saints throughout Denmark and by family in Utah, where her name was placed on the temple prayer rolls.27

Samuelsen’s rather extensive diary records his enjoyment of food and drink, documenting a nuanced observation of the Word of Wisdom, whose complex history merits further study. Thomas Alexander found that, around the turn of the twentieth century, individual LDS leaders varied widely on what constituted proper observance and what should be required of Church members. Some apostles considered Danish beer acceptable, including Brigham Young Jr. and Anthon H. Lund, a Dane who served as an apostle (1889–1921) and in the First Presidency (1901–21). Church President Lorenzo Snow emphasized abstinence from meat. Samuelsen’s case may suggest how the policy was observed by other devout Danish Saints at that time. He apparently did not smoke but frequently drank coffee, particularly on social occasions, while, on other occasions, he drank boiled water or hot chocolate. He apparently avoided distilled alcoholic beverages but drank beer and wine. On special occasions, he drank champagne and, for medicinal purposes, the occasional cognac toddy or hot port wine toddy. In 1895 Samuelsen told visiting missionaries that henceforth he would observe the Word of Wisdom—by abstaining from pork (May 7, 1895). Lars Larsen-Ledet, a local journalist and politician who became Denmark’s foremost advocate for abstinence from alcohol, observed: “When his [Samuelsen’s] colleagues ordered drinks, Samuelsen quietly let the battery of bottles

27Samuelsen, Diary, September 1–November 13, 1914.
pass him by. At the most, he sipped a glass of Champagne. Thanks to this restraint he maintained his health and his naturalness. In other words: a splendid fellow.”

By the time Samuelsen and Marie were baptized in 1892, nearly 12,000 Danes converted to Mormonism had responded to the call to “gather to Zion.” In the 1850s and early 1860s, the gathering had been promoted urgently as a means of escaping the imminent destruction of Babylon and the misery that would engulf all nations before Christ’s second coming. By the century’s end, that urgency had faded considerably. In view of economic doldrums in the United States, agitation on both sides of the Atlantic against Mormon immigration, and the challenges many immigrants faced with language, cultural adjust-


29 Jenson, History of the Scandinavian Mission, 534, shows a total of 11,778 emigrants from Denmark in 1852–92. The classic work on Latter-day Saint emigration from Scandinavia is William Mulder, Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migration from Scandinavia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957; 2d ed. published in cooperation with Brigham Young University Press, 2000).
ments, and employment, European Saints—especially those who were well-off in their native countries—were encouraged to think twice before pulling up stakes. If they did leave for America, they were to maintain a low profile.30 Yet devout Latter-day Saints realized that one of the most treasured aspects of their religion—temple ordinances linking them eternally with loved ones both living and deceased—was only available in America. Church President Joseph F. Smith, visiting Europe in 1906, told members in London, “Peace be with you, and may you live to gather to Zion and rejoice in the mountains in the midst of the people of God, and receive the fullness of the blessings of the Gospel.” They were not to be in a hurry, but the ideal of the gathering lived on. Smith’s discourse was translated and published in the mission periodical in Denmark.31 The Samuelsen’s two daughters eventually emigrated, as did the Christiansens,32 while Samuelsen, Marie, and their two sons remained in Denmark until 1919.

With the rapid industrialization in Denmark in the closing decades of the nineteenth century came volatile labor relations. Before effective collective bargaining arrangements were established, unions and employers circled each other warily, seeking to gain leverage by creating increasingly comprehensive associations to take joint action. As a skilled tradesman, Samuelsen found his early years of em-

30“Om Emigration” (About Emigration), Skandinaviens Stjerne 55 (August 1, 1906): 231.


Employment in Århus unfulfilling. He complained in his diary about work at the sewing machine factory, writing on January 4, 1895: “I have no desire to do this work. I would wish that I were working in Copenhagen. Everything is so boring here; one must wait for everything.” Arbitrary actions on the part of his employer were another concern, as were undoubtedly wages and hours. A turning point came one morning in May 1895 when Samuelsen’s employer asked if he belonged to the smiths and machinists union. Samuelsen did. Workers at the largest factory in Århus, Frichs Efterførlgere (Frichs’s Successors) were considering a strike. Samuelsen and other union members were then subjected to a widespread preemptive two-month lockout by factory owners, which in his case began that same day at noon (May 25–29, 1895; July 22, 1895). As if to demonstrate their determination to maintain morale, Samuelsen and other workers—and apparently their families—undertook a festive outing that very afternoon. There was dancing and coffee; Samuelsen played the accordion and photographed the group.

*Employees of A. Nielsen’s Sewing Machine Factory, summer outing, 1895. F. F Samuelsen is third from the left in the second row, with wife Marie and daughter Julia in front. Courtesy of Lokalhistorisk Samling, Århus Kommunes Hovedbibliotek. Samuelsen took a group photograph at the May 27 outing on the first day of a lockout. This may be that photograph.*
Although just previous to the lockout, Samuelsen had declined an invitation to serve as a member of a labor committee commissioned to negotiate with the management at Frichs, now he rallied with other unionists. He solicited funds, which he helped distribute to the families of fellow locked-out workers, helped establish an employment service (July 3 and 16, 1895), and shared his experiences with others. After the factory owners ended the lockout, Samuelsen’s union activity intensified. He served as union vice-chairman and eventually, after much persuasion, as its chairman (January 28, 1897). Three months later in a disagreement over holiday pay, his employer contemptuously called him a “socialist chieftain”—a political as well as a personal slur—and reassigned Samuelsen’s young assistant (May 3, 1897). A lockout in the Danish iron industry soon followed, running from June to September, affecting about 240 employees locally including Samuelsen. He was elected chairman of those who had been locked out, and coordinated the collection and distribution of donations for the workers (June 9 and September 13, 1897). Rather than returning to the sewing machine factory, he found employment at the Danish national railway’s workshops in Århus, where he began work two weeks after the lockout ended (September 29, 1897). This job provided him with a more secure base from which to operate than had his work at the sewing machine factory.

Samuelsen was a delegate to the January 1898 meetings in Copenhagen at which labor unions formed a national confederation. He proudly noted in his diary: “Denmark now stood as number 1 in the whole world, in that all organized workers were now joined together in one huge federation” (January 5, 1898).

These were heady times for Samuelsen, who was deeply involved in recruiting union members, decisions about proposed strikes, and negotiations with employers. Some of the negotiations were successful, and sometimes word from Samuelsen that a strike was imminent won concessions even if the employer first refused to negotiate. Union members were enthusiastically appreciative of his efforts. He seems to have been both firm but mild-mannered, willing to work for compromises agreeable to both sides, but committed to finding solutions to improve labor conditions (December 2, 1898). One Saturday in December 1898, he spoke at a successful meeting to recruit new unionists in Vejle for the Smiths and Machine Workers’ Union. At the conclusion of a convivial union meeting that followed, about forty to fifty smiths accompanied him and the representative of another un-
ion to the train station at 1:30 A.M., singing and shouting, “Hurrah for Folketingsmand Samuelsen and Christiansen.” (December 3, 1898). (Folketingsmand means, literally, the “people’s thing man,” or representative to the popularly elected House of Representatives.) For union members in a city other than his own to refer to Samuelsen in the singular as if he was or would be a representative to the Danish parliament more than seven years before his actual election must have been a remarkable compliment; his personality, his accomplishments, or both were clearly winning supporters.

When he saw a problem, Samuelsen tended to look for an organized effort as a solution. His willingness to represent his fellow laborers and to accede when they urged him to accept positions of trust and leadership involved him in an astounding number of organizations and meetings, among them a workers’ savings and loan organization, a burial association, and a local property owners association (May 16, 1913).

The so-called September Settlement of 1899 brought about the end of the nationwide hundred-day lockout that had evoked anti-union expressions from Samuelsen’s Latter-day Saint branch president. It established the legitimacy of Danish labor unions as an agent for collective bargaining. As the biographer of one of labor’s participants in the negotiations, future Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning, wrote in 2008, although scarcely anyone at the time would have imagined it, “the settlement” together with the passage of laws regarding the government’s mediator, passage of rules for dealing with labor disputes, and the establishment of the right to work, attained in 1910 the status of the constitution of the labor market, that still prevails to this day.33 It also enhanced the growing popularity of the Social Democratic Party in Denmark. Organized in the 1870s, closely allied with the labor movement and with other socialist organizations worldwide in the Second International, the party based its program on the thinking of Karl Marx. It sought fundamental, comprehensive changes in the ordering of society, and eschewed activities that could be interpreted to signal acceptance of the prevailing power structure. Yet rather than advocating revolution as a primary agent of change, as did some elements in the Second International, the Danish wing sought reform

that would give the working class control over government through the ballot box. The Socialists had their first two candidates elected to the 114-member Danish Folketing in 1884; by 1901 they had 14 seats in the Folketing, compared with 76 for the Left Reform party, 15 for the Moderate Left, and 8 for the heretofore ruling party, the Right.

Samuelsen’s leadership in a union led quite naturally to involvement in the Social Democratic Party, the main party representing Danish workers. He became a member of the supervisory board for the Socialist newspaper published in Århus.

Local labor leader Harald Jensen, a well-known editor and political figure in Århus, was the first Social Democrat elected to the city council (1894). Samuelsen and five other party members joined him on the council in 1900, with Samuelsen receiving the lowest vote tally of the seven (January 9, 1900). After six years of service on the council, Samuelsen was reelected with the highest number of votes of any candidate (January 15, 1906), which he interpreted as an indication that his work was appreciated.

Municipal infrastructure was a major focus for Samuelsen. He served on the committee for the city’s waterworks; and for thirteen years, one of his major assignments on the city council was with the committee overseeing the municipal electric power system, which powered trolley cars as well as lights. While others on the city council played the role of financial and procedural watchdog, Samuelsen considered himself an advocate and facilitator for the system’s administrators, working to expand and upgrade its facilities (April 11, 1913). In 1911 he negotiated with Burmester and Wain, a major Danish firm, for a large diesel engine for the Århus system. With his encouragement, the company lowered its original bid to compete with—and eventually beat out—that of a German manufacturer. Fellow Social Democratic council member Jakob Jensen protested about changing the bid, but in the end Samuelsen had the city council’s support for one of his favorite causes: promoting the use of goods manufactured by Danish workers (December 1, 14, 15, 18, 21, 1911). In the thirteen years during which he was assigned to the committee overseeing Århus’s electric power plant, he missed only eleven of that committee’s meetings (April 9, 1913).

Highly critical of the monarchy and the clergy, Denmark’s Social Democratic Party issued official expressions of disapproval when its members broke from the party line. In 1913 the party sent such a statement to the Social Democratic members of the Århus City Coun-
cil, of whom Samuelsen was one, for flying flags to welcome the recently crowned King Christian X when he visited Århus for the first time. Samuelsen and his colleagues rejected the reproof and had their formal protest inserted in the proceedings of the next party congress.34

Fellow Social Democrat Harald Jensen was the first member of his party elected to the Rigsdag from Århus in 1895, representing the Århus south district in the Folketing, the more democratically elected lower house. On May 29, 1906, he proudly wrote in his diary that he had been reelected for the fourth time. Members of the upper house, the Landsting, were elected in a complicated system that involved, among other things, voting by a body of eligible voters who paid the highest taxes. They selected electors, who in turn elected some of the Landsting delegates. Other members of the Landsting were selected from among the one thousand wealthiest citizens of Denmark. This system of voting, established in 1866 by Denmark’s second constitution, facilitated a balance of power between the conservative Right party, which dominated the Landsting, and parties on the left, which by 1906 included the Left Reform Party, the Radical Left Party, and the Social Democrats. In September, Jensen was drafted as a compromise candidate for representative to the Landsting and won, becoming one of the first two Social Democrats to hold seats in that body (September 20 and 21, 1906).

Suddenly there was an opening for a new Social Democrat candidate for the Folketing. A special election was called for October 30. Earlier that year in elections for the Århus city council, where Samuelsen and Jensen were already serving, Samuelsen had received the highest number of votes of any candidate, even surpassing Jensen by a narrow margin of 49 votes as they and a slate of eight other Social Democrats won all the available seats (January 15, 1906). Such an impressive victory must have encouraged Samuelsen to run for higher office. When the Social Democratic party met to choose a candidate, seven individuals were nominated. One newspaper reported later

34For the protest, February 13, 2013, see “Staunings tale om reformkursen på Socialdemokratiets kongres 1915” (Stauning’s Speech about the Course of Reform at the Social Democratic Party Congress, 1915), http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/staunings-tale-om-reformkursen-paa-socialdemokratiets-kongres-1915/. See also Samuelsen, Diary, June 22, 1912, March 5, 1913.
that Jensen favored Marius Simonsen, editor of the local Social Democratic paper, as his successor in the Folketing. However, Samuelsen, with strong support from labor, became the Social Democrats’ candidate and won a clear majority of their votes, 100 more than the other six candidates combined (October 7, 1906).

A local newspaper ran a headline reading “Candidate for Folketing at the Mormon Pulpit.” Samuelsen’s impression was that most readers thought it was a wretched article. “Now that I have been proclaimed to be the candidate for the Folketing, the persecution begins,” he confided to his diary (October 7, 1906).35


Hosting the voters’ meeting at Bering, about fifteen kilometers

35The newspaper was Århus Posten (The Århus Post).
southwest of the Århus city center, was Jørgen Teilmann, longstand-
ing pastor of the voluntarily constituted Evangelical Lutheran con-
gregation based there. After the meeting he extended an invitation
to coffee. Samuelsen drank boiled water and joined the conversation
apprehensively.

Pastor Teilmann asked if it was correct that I was a Mormon. I an-
swered, ‘Yes, I have been for almost 14 years.’ He could not understand
that—such an enlightened person as I, and by the way it was the only un-
favorable thing he had heard about me. I didn’t think that should make
me a lesser person. Harald Jensen expressed the thought that we con-
sider religion a private matter, to which the Pastor agreed. At this meet-
ing I had expected opposition from the priest, but that didn’t happen.
(October 28, 1906)

Axel Nielsen, Harald Jensen’s opponent in the previous Folke-
ting election five months earlier, also spoke at the last of the voter
meetings, and Samuelsen reported cryptically, “It was a very lively
meeting. It closed with a “Long Live” for me and for tomorrow’s elec-
tion.” Samuelsen and Nielsen stepped out for a bite to eat. The follow-
ing morning, when the voters gathered to listen to invited speeches in
behalf of the candidates, Samuelsen found himself unopposed. The festivities proceeded; and after an hour of speech-making, the mayor allowed the prescribed fifteen minutes for the required fifty voters to request balloting in writing. After a quarter-hour without a response, he proclaimed Samuelsen to have been chosen as the Folketing representative without a vote (October 30 1906). Samuelsen was the only candidate for the Folketing that year to run unopposed.36 In the general election earlier that year, the party’s candidates had garnered about one-third more votes than in the previous election three years earlier, and the number of their representatives to the Folketing increased by one-half. Samuelsen joined twenty-three party colleagues in the lower house.37 Thus began the final stage of his political service, a period that lasted until 1917.

While Samuelsen could generally count on the strong support of organized labor, which was closely allied with the Social Democratic Party, his constituency was broader. Particularly noteworthy was the endorsement in subsequent election campaigns of Pastor Jørgen Teilmann, his host at the 1906 voter meeting described above. The established Evangelical Lutheran Church was not monolithic. Some of Denmark’s most aggressive opposition to Mormonism came from a pietistic branch of the church called Den Kirkelig Forening for den Indre Mission (the Religious Association for the Home Mission), which published anti-Mormon writings including those of Århus pastor H. O. Frimodt-Møller. From its founding in 1853, Indre-Mission had sought to combat the Mormons, the Baptists, and other religious movements working to convert Danes.

By contrast, Teilmann and his congregation were adherents of the religious, cultural, political, and educational folk movement inspired by Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig, which constituted another branch of the established church. Teilmann was a strong supporter of religious tolerance, advocated political and religious freedom, urged equal rights for women, and supported political candidates he considered most likely to accomplish the most for the causes he espoused. He was not a Social Democrat. His speeches in behalf of Samuelsen’s


37 E. Wiinblad and Alsing Andersen, Det Danske Socialdemokratis Historie fra 1871 til 1921 (The History of Danish Social Democracy from 1871 to 1921) (København: Socialdemokratiets Forlag Fremad, 1921), 191.
candidacy in subsequent elections in 1909 and 1910 followed his earlier endorsements for a freethinker, J. V. Pingen, in 1884 and for Samuelsen’s predecessor, Harald Jensen, in 1901. While religious tolerance in the political arena was far from universal, Samuelsen was clearly a beneficiary. The responses of Minister of Culture Jacob Appel, another adherent of Grundtvig’s teachings, to Samuelsen’s queries in the Folketing also exemplified a characteristic even-handedness.38

With relatively little internal tension, Samuelsen was able to combine his energetic involvement as a Social Democrat politician, a labor leader, and a Latter-day Saint. The reputation he established in his involvement with organized labor and in the city council seems largely to have insulated him from potential negative impact resulting from his religion. Despite ongoing deprecation of the Mormons by one element of the Lutheran established church and in some of the media, neither colleagues nor most of the general public seem to have had serious concerns with either facet of his life.

In 1910, Denmark’s Social Democrats hosted a major congress of the Second International, attended by delegates from throughout Europe. Banners in the hall bore slogans that reflected some of their ideals and their goals:

- Labour is the source of wealth.
- We build on solidarity.
- Knowledge is strength.
- Religion is a private matter.
- No private monopolies.
- The Will of the People is the highest law.
- Universal equal suffrage.
- A maximum working day of eight hours.
- Disarmament means peace.
- One and the same law for women and men.
- Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.39

For many of the delegates, the lofty slogans had little connec-


tion with their political realities; but for Samuelsen and his Danish colleagues, serious progress had been made on some of these fronts. Samuelsen’s effectiveness in serving his constituents was aided by the general sense in Denmark that religion was a private matter.

In the Rigsdag, Samuelsen continued to focus on issues of importance to his constituents. He promoted the manufacture of locomotives by Frichs, Inc., the largest factory in Århus, worked for new railroad facilities for passengers and freight in Århus, addressed various labor issues, and helped obtain appropriations for the theater in Århus. He conscientiously prepared himself with facts and figures to demonstrate the urgency and importance of his requests (March 6, 1913).

Samuelsen spent much of his time on trains and ferries, dashing back and forth between Århus and Copenhagen to fulfill both his responsibilities in the Rigsdag and those in the city council. The trip was long enough to consume most of a day or a night. He had a free railroad pass. In Copenhagen he stayed at a modest temperance hotel. His one indulgence was frequent nights at Copenhagen’s Royal Theatre, for which he could obtain a free ticket for any performance he wished.

In addition to his speech in the Rigsdag in October 1912 reacting to rumors that LDS missionaries would be expelled, Samuelsen defended a newly won right of fellow Danish Mormons. In October 1910, an LDS widow in Århus died, and Samuelsen notified a local pastor that the Mormons intended to conduct a graveside service at the local cemetery, a practice permitted by a 1907 law. One hour before the scheduled ceremony, the diocese’s archdeacon sent a message forbidding the service. In response to Samuelsen’s query in the Rigsdag, Jacob Appel, the minister of culture, replied that even consulting the Lutheran minister was not required. After notifying the cemetery administrator, the mourners could perform what was called a civil burial—singing a hymn and giving a speech at the graveside, but not following any particular ritual unless the ministry of culture had approved such a ritual. The archdeacon had been wrong.40

As a measure of Samuelsen’s popularity, he noted in his diary that the unorthodox pastor Jørgen Teilmann told him in 1909 that,

---

40Folketingets Forhandlinger, October 29, 1910, cols. 1423–24, with explanatory marginal note by Samuelsen, LDS Church History Library.
while he was not a Social Democrat, Samuelsen’s politics were the closest to the pastor’s own of any of the candidates’ positions. Teilmann had volunteered to campaign for Samuelsen in 1909 and 1910 elections but declined to do so in the May 1913 election. He told Samuelsen that the electioneering meeting would take too much time because there were four candidates. Samuelsen surmised that the real reason was Samuelsen’s widely publicized query about Denmark’s possible joining with Norway and Sweden in expelling LDS missionaries. This question and answer seven months earlier had, Samuelsen guessed, resulted in pressure by other Lutheran clergy on Teilmann to avoid publicly supporting the Mormon candidate (May 20, 1913).

For the 1913 election, four parties fielded a candidate for the Folketing in Samuelsen’s district. Michael Johansen represented the party of the Right, the conservative party that represented the interests of large landowners and the wealthiest Danes. It maintained power far out of proportion to the number of its constituents through its domination of the Landsting and opposed a new draft constitution. The three parties on the left all favored the draft constitution. Jens Nielsen-Jexen represented the Left Reform Party; Samuelsen the Social Democrats, whose core constituency was the laborers; and Lars Larsen-Ledet the Radical Left party. The Radical Left and the Social Democrats had agreed behind the scenes on tactical cooperation in an effort to strengthen their joint efforts on behalf of constitutional revision.

Forty years later, Larsen-Ledet described the campaign vividly and with obvious relish in a local historical publication. According to Larsen-Ledet, who had studied at Oxford and at the Sorbonne, Samuelsen provided little excitement as a debater, rarely cracked a really good joke, and was relatively poorly posted on many issues. Yet Samuelsen won handily. Samuelsen’s predecessor said, according to Larsen-Ledet, that a walking stick wearing a hat would win in the southern district with a substantial majority, provided that he was a

---

41Larsen-Ledet, Det sidste Torvevalg, 210–38.
socialist. Larsen-Ledet described Samuelsen as “a good, pleasant man without other raw edges than that he was a Mormon. But since he by no means practiced the harem theories of the Mormons, but on the contrary lived a nice, happy family life in monogamy, there was no one who minded his religion—with the exception of his predecessor, Harald Jensen, who found that it was something strange and admonished him to stop it.” But Samuelsen rejected this rebuke. “The religious feeling was obviously genuine in his case,” summarized Larsen-Ledet. “And his personal conduct was above reproach.”

Aside from Samuelsen’s 1905 removal from a school board because he was not Lutheran (March 18, April 29, May 9, 1905), his Mormonism was a non-issue and he could count on strong support from the Social Democrats. He was a diligent workhorse, willing to shoulder responsibility, and a conscientious advocate for local issues that mattered to his constituents. Even though he was a Latter-day Saint, they seem to have considered him to be one of them. So Samuelsen racked up more than twice the number of votes of his closest opponent, and the Social Democrats increased their number of seats in the Folketing from 24 to 32.

Declarations of war in 1914 by major European powers were gut-wrenching for Social Democrats; but for Samuelsen, 1915 was a banner year. In January he was reelected leader of the Århus division of the Danish Smiths and Machinists’ Union despite a verbal attack at the election meeting from blacksmith H. P. Christensen, who, Samuelsen thought, wanted the seat himself (January 29, 1915; also October 16, 1914). In February, he summarized the results of collective bargaining with representatives of the bicycle industry association: “We got the best agreement that exists in the kingdom of Denmark” (February 8, 1915). At that point, Samuelsen was chairing a committee to oversee the erection of a new railroad depot for Århus, for which he had lobbied for years. He preached a sermon at the Copenhagen Branch that was published in the mission periodical in Sep-

---

44Ibid.
45Samuelsen, Diary, December 16, 1914; see also October 11, 1913; December 1, 8, 12, 1914.
On April 18, 1915, by invitation he delivered an address on law and justice in the various periods of history at the Århus Baptist Church and closed by bearing his testimony to Mormonism’s truth. To his great joy, a new constitution, featuring universal suffrage—including woman suffrage—was passed into law. “This is the greatest red-letter day I have experienced,” wrote Samuelsen on June 5. “Denmark now has the freest constitution in all Europe, with equal and universal suffrage for all. The earl now has no more right to vote than his day laborer or his servant.”

The personal high point of 1915 was Samuelsen and Marie’s festive celebration of their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary at their attractive home, half of a duplex villa near the Marselisborg Woods. Samuelsen thought Marie was beautiful in her new dress. There were many guests and many gifts. The national chairman of the Social Democratic Party, Thorvald Stauning, came to congratulate them. Newspapers all over the country noted the event, according to Samuelsen’s diary. This attention seemed to reflect the esteem in which

---

46Sermon, Skandinaviens Stjerne (Star of Scandinavia), September 1, 1915, 265–67.
he was held by his constituencies (August 8, 1915).

Then in 1917 a bizarre little incident representing an impulsive bad decision turned life upside down for the Samuelsens. After an apparently contentious meeting of Århus Social Democrats to decide on candidates for the city council, someone sent an anonymous postcard to a rival newspaper reporting details about the proceedings of the meeting. Instead of printing the juicy tidbit, the editor showed the postcard to Harald Jensen. Someone asked Samuelsen whether he had written the postcard. He initially denied it but later apologized to Jakob Jensen, another Social Democrat on the city council, for having written about him on the postcard. Jensen seemed willing to forgive and forget; but journalist Larsen-Ledet heard the rumors and skillfully probed others until the story of Samuelsen’s misdeed broke.

The chronology of these events in Samuelsen’s diary seems to be out of alignment with contemporary newspaper reports. At some point in the process, a delegation of three, headed by Marius Simonsen, editor of Demokraten (The Democrat), the local Socialist newspaper, confronted Samuelsen and demanded that he sign a statement agreeing to resign all his political positions. Marie was ill, and the flustered Samuelsen signed the statement, which he later regretted. Sending the postcard was, he confided to his diary, a stupid thing to have done, but others had provided rival newspapers with similar information verbally on countless other occasions. He interpreted the reaction as the opportunity others had been seeking to jettison him (May 3, 1917). But then, a diary entry, possibly written after the fact, notes that he had signed the statement on the forty-third anniversary of his father’s death: “It was as if he came and requested of me that now I should go to the temple of the Lord and perform the ordinances for which he has waited on me for so many years.” Samuelsen saw this explanation as face-saving, but he also complained, “I don’t understand why it should take such a severe reminder, for although I had indeed resisted traveling to Zion, now I had promised that we would leave in a year or two at the latest” (May 3, 1917). Another newspaper, Århus Stiftstidende, published a short article with a cartoon sketch of Samuelsen, alluding to Samuelsen’s forced resignation as

---

47“Sølvbryllup” (Silver Wedding Anniversary), Århus Demokraten, August 2, 1915.

“harakiri.” A later article added more details, deploring the Social Democrats’ harsh discipline.

Although local party leaders sent Samuelsen a letter stating that he no longer represented the party, he actually continued as a member of the Rigsdag until the following spring, when he intended to emigrate. In addition to the confusion of war, the American government turned down Samuelsen’s initial application. A complicating factor was the LDS German-language newspaper published in Salt Lake City. Eventually Samuelsen enlisted U.S. Senator Reed Smoot; with his help, Samuelsen, Marie, and their two sons emigrated in 1919. By 1918, all but four LDS missionaries had returned to the United States;


50“Forholdene i det aarhusianske Socialdemokrati” (Conditions in the Århus Social Democratic Party), Århus Stiftstidende, May 20, 1917, 2.
Samuelsen served as president of the Århus Conference for eight months in 1918 and 1919.\textsuperscript{51} Heretofore, his Church leadership beyond the branch auxiliary level had consisted of presiding over and conducting several Sunday evening meetings in 1915 in the absence of the branch president (March 7, June 13, July 25, 1915).\textsuperscript{52}

Samuelsen and Marie settled in Salt Lake City where they diligently performed temple work for their deceased relatives, as promised. For a time, Samuelsen presided over the Scandinavian-language meetings that were held quarterly in the Assembly Hall on Temple Square. Although he had occasionally taken English instruction in Denmark—presumably in anticipation of their eventual emigration—Samuelsen’s English was never fluent.

LDS Assistant Church Historian Andrew Jenson had served as mission president for Denmark and Norway (1909–12), and Samuelsen had traveled with him to Sweden, Finland, and Russia in May 1912.\textsuperscript{53} In Jenson’s autobiography, he recounts the death of his old friend on May 9, 1929, at age sixty-four. Jenson, who spoke at the funeral, wrote:

\begin{quote}
[Samuelsen] was one of my most intimate friends. He had been a faithful and successful worker in the Church for many years before leaving his native country to come to Utah. As a member of the city council in Århus and as a member of the Danish Rigsdag (Parliament) he obtained for the Latter-day Saints in Denmark many privileges which had not previously been accorded them. After his arrival in Utah he was handicapped considerably[,] for being somewhat advanced in years he did not master the English language to any great degree of perfection, although he could speak it tolerably well. The general opinion was that he died broken-hearted as the quiet life he had been forced to lead in Utah was such a contrast to his public activities in his native country.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

Jenson’s assessment may suggest more about his own point of view than about Samuelsen’s. Many Latter-day Saints who immigrated to

\textsuperscript{51}Århus Conference/District, Historical Manuscript, History and Historical Reports, January 16, 1922, LDS Church History Library.
\textsuperscript{52}Århus Branch Historical Record, 1913–15, January 31, February 7, March 14, 21, 28, 1915, LDS Church History Library.
\textsuperscript{53}Jenson, \textit{Autobiography of Andrew Jenson}, 496–97.
\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 603–4. Marie died March 20, 1936.
the United States as adults enjoyed more prominence in their native lands—either before immigration or returning as missionaries or mission presidents—than they did in America. But Samuelsen, whose political position in Denmark was unparalleled for a Latter-day Saint, left little evidence of discontent after he was able to reunite with family members in the Mountain West and become a full citizen in his own religion.
TANNER LECTURE

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS, THE DOUGHNUT, AND POST-CHRISTIAN CANADA

David B. Marshall

As an historian of Canada who specializes in religion and popular culture, I could not resist the metaphor of the doughnut when I came across it in Jan Shipps’s opening essay, “Gentiles, Mormons, and the History of the American West” in her wonderful book of essays, Sojourner in a Promised Land. In alluding to the doughnut, and especially the hole in the middle surrounded by the calorie-rich dough around it, she was highlighting her concern about the absence of scholarship about the Mormon people and faith in the historiography of the American West. It seemed particularly puzzling since the story of the Mormons in American society had a rich historiography of its own. Shipps’s intention in using the metaphor of the doughnut was “to raise neglect of the Mormon West to consciousness and suggest some reasons why many, if not most, historians of the West shape the western story like a doughnut, circling all around the Great Basin, taking into account and telling

DAVID B. MARSHALL {marshall@ucalgary.ca} is an historian at the University of Calgary. He is the author of Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1860–1940 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) and numerous articles on religious life in Canada. He and his wife, Diane, have three children. He delivered this Tanner Lecture at the Mormon History Association annual conference, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, July 2012.

nearly every western story except the Mormon one."\(^2\)

In essence I am echoing this observation and applying it to Canadian historiography. Shipps’s metaphor of the doughnut is also appropriate, if not more so, to Mormonism in the historiography of the Canadian West and of the history of religion in Canada. Despite overriding concern with regionalism, multiculturalism, and ethnicity in Canadian historiography, the history of the Mormons has not attracted very much attention. This assertion may be a little surprising when one thinks of the superb collection of articles from the 1987 conference in Edmonton at the University of Alberta published in *The Mormon Presence in Canada* (1990). But this volume has had minimal influence or impact on Canadian historiography. After this promising start to writing the story of the Mormons in Canada, there has been very little scholarship. The landscape of Mormon historiography in Canada is virtually barren.

Rarely is the Mormon story integrated into the overall narrative or analysis of Canadian history. John Herd Thompson’s recent survey *Forging the Prairie West* (1998) contained only one paragraph on the initial settlement of the Mormons in southern Alberta. Thompson integrated the Mormon story with that of other religious minorities, such as the Mennonites, Hutterites, and Doukhobors, who had been persecuted in their homelands and arrived in the Canadian West in the late nineteenth century.\(^3\) So long as they did not challenge Canadian norms, the Canadian government was eager to accommodate these minorities since they were viewed as successful agriculturalists and therefore desirable settlers. The Mormons integrated into Canadian society with minimal difficulty or controversy, since the question of polygamy was quickly settled.\(^4\) This rapid integration and quiescent lifestyle perhaps accounts for the lack of historiographical interest. The Mormon story in southern Alberta did not provide an opportunity to investigate


\(^4\) See Howard Palmer, “Polygamy and Progress: The Reaction to Mormons in Canada, 1887–1923” in Brigham Y. Card, Herbert C. Northcott,
the limits of Canadian tolerance for an ethno-religious minority, as in the case for Doukhobors, Hutterites, and Mennonites; and so Latter-day Saints have all but disappeared from the historical literature.⁵⁺⁺

From the perspective of religious history, the metaphor of the doughnut or the omission of the Mormon story is even more startling. The best example is Benjamin Smillie’s *Visions of a New Jerusalem*, a collection of essays on the religious settlement of the prairie west. The editor “wanted to focus on the optimism of some of the pioneer Protestant groups who came to the prairie with the hope of building a new society, a New Jerusalem...a vision which emphasizes that it is God’s promise to give the gift of a new [and better] world.”⁶⁺⁺ This symbol of hope for a better place where one could worship and practice one’s faith in peace was central to the history of prairie settlement, according to Smillie. He argues that the Canadian West was settled by religious groups fleeing religious persecution and seeking to build the “Kingdom of God” in virgin territory. But in selecting these various ethno-religious groups, he consciously overlooked—indeed, dismissed—the Mormons. His criteria were that the representative groups must be from the “First Nations” or the “main Judeo-Christian tradition.” Whatever one thinks of the thorny question of whether the Mormons or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should be considered part of the Judeo-Christian tradition or not,⁷ it is still difficult to fathom a group that would be better suited to the quest of building a New Jerusalem on vir-

---


⁷On the question of Mormons as Christians, there is no better guide
gin Canadian territory than the Mormons.8

Discussion of the Mormons in the historiography of religion in
Canada is sporadic at best. In the rare cases of reference to the Mor-
mon faith, it is usually included in a list of new religious movements to
indicate the growing diversity of the Canadian religious landscape.9
Sustained description and analysis of the Mormons do not exist. In a
recent survey that seeks to be inclusive of all religions, Mormonism is
briefly featured in a concluding chapter on "alternative religions"
that also includes sections on the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Sci-
entists, Pentecostals, and many New Age religious movements such as
Yoga, Hare Krishna, and Scientology. The author briefly discusses
the beginnings of the Mormon faith and its controversial doctrines
and practices (e.g., plural marriage, baptism for the dead, and com-
mitment to proselytizing missions). It concludes with a short para-
graph of statistics and the comment that “at the end of the twentieth
century the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is deeply
rooted in the United States and Utah, in particular.”10 This entry is ac-
companied by a photograph of the Cardston Alberta Temple. The
implication seems to be that Mormonism is an American faith, not an


8See, for example, Charles Ora Card’s diary entry for July 4, 1889, in
which he approvingly cites Apostle John W. Taylor’s prediction “that this
would become a fruitful land and that in time it would be a haven of rest for
those of our people who desired to serve the Lord.” Donald Godfrey and
Brigham Card, eds., The Diaries of Charles Ora Card: The Canadian Years,
1886–1903 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 96–97. Taylor
was the son of LDS Church President John Taylor and developed significant
interests in Mormon colonization in Alberta.

8See, for example, John S. Moir, The Church in the British Era (Toronto:
McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1972), 121, 188; John Webster Grant, The Church in
the Canadian Era (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1972), 177; John Webster
Grant, A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth Century Ontario (Toronto:
University of Toronto Press, 1988), 73, 115; Terence Murphy and Roberto
Perin, eds., A Concise History of Christianity in Canada (Toronto: Oxford Uni-
versity Press, 1996) 139, 179.

10Robert Choquette, Canada’s Religions (Ottawa: University of Ot-
integral part of the Canadian story or religious landscape. The more recent *The Religions of Canadians* (2012), is strikingly similar but even shorter with Mormons being relegated to an “afterword.”

This lamentable story is no better in the recent innovative scholarship on the borderlands of the Canadian-American West. Unlike the concept of “boundary,” which separate or divides, the concept of “borderlands” indicates an area divided by a national border but where people mingle and interact. The emphasis is on the cross-border relationships. “In this sense,” according to Betsy Jameson, “national borders separate places where social relationships cross those borders.”

The value of this borderlands perspective for Mormon studies in Canada was anticipated by Dean Louder in *The Mormon Presence in Canada*: “For decades, Alberta Saints have watched their children seek educational and marriage opportunities at church institutions in the United States only to remain afterward as Americans. Canadian Mormons who wish to affirm a separate national identity face a special set of circumstances and a challenge greater than that of their fellow Canadians.” For the Saints of Alberta, “the international boundary was essentially nonexistent and hence “oft-crossed.”

Scholarship on the borderlands between Alberta and Montana (and, by extension, Idaho and Utah), fails to mention the Mormons, even though the initial migration to southern Alberta, and then the continuing relationship with the Great Basin Kingdom, is a perfect example of what these historians mean by borderlands.

Only very recently has the Mormon experience in Canada caught the eye of Canadian social historians. Sarah Carter provides a

---


14 Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Edmonton: University of Alberta
sensitive analysis of Mormon marriage practices in southern Alberta in her *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915*. Her primary concern, however, is with how the Canadian government imposed a Canadian or respectable Victorian definition of marriage on the indigenous peoples of western Canada. Nevertheless, she demonstrates that both the Native and Latter-day Saints’ unique marriage customs and family structures were outlawed by the Canadian state. In *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*, Francis Swrypia is concerned with the founding stories or mythology of the different people who settled the Canadian prairie before 1914. These stories, she suggests, are persistent and play a central role in defining a sense of identity for the various ethnic groups in western Canada. The story of the Mormon trek to the Cardston area by a few families fleeing the anti-polygamy forces of the American government holds a powerful place in the imaginations of Canadian Latter-day Saints, she contends.

This metaphor of the doughnut can be pushed further. The Canadian Mormon story is also absent in the recent literature on the rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a world or global religion. For instance, in the special 1996 issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, dedicated to the expansion of LDS Church activity around the world, there was not an article about Canada although the issue included articles about other British dominions or settler colonies, such as Australia and New Zealand. If Canada is considered at all in this literature, it is as part of North America, suggesting that the Canadian experience is similar to—or, indeed, is a part of—that of the United States. In this regard, scholars are following the classic work of historical geographer D. W. Menig, who considered the Cardston area of southern Alberta a refugee area or a satellite sphere of the Great Basin Kingdom-based Mormon culture region. As Dean Louder concluded twenty years ago, “Mormon scholars have yet to discover Canada. . . . There is no substantive overview, historical,
sociological or ethnographic, of this so-called ethno-religious people in Canadian culture.¹⁷ This omission endures today. The promising beginnings represented in the contributions to The Mormon Presence in Canada have, for the most part, lain dormant.

There are no studies indicating how the Mormons in Canada integrated and assimilated while struggling to maintain their “peculiar” identity.¹⁸ Indeed, it is not known whether the Saints in Canada were under the same assimilating pressures as they faced in the United States. Has Canada’s sense of being a multi-cultural society made a difference? Has the different context of Canadian society somehow created a different Mormon society in Canada? Here we can see the problem with talking about a doughnut hole. Where does it lead? You end up with nothing or nowhere, so to speak, with little, if anything, to talk about. I am reduced to asking a series of questions without being able to provide much in the way of answers or analysis. But what I can do is outline the context of Canadian religious history since 1945. There are some striking parallels with events and trends in the religious history of the United States, but the story is still a different one.

**The Canadian Religious Landscape since 1945**

The story of the Latter-day Saints in post Second World War Canada is one of significant growth. To use Richard Bennett’s apt phrase, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada has developed from a “struggling seed” in its early days in the Cardston region to what is now a “branching maple” with temples in major cities.

---


across Canada. The Cardston Temple, dedicated in 1923, remained the only Mormon temple in Canada until 1990, when the Toronto Temple was dedicated. Following that, temples were dedicated in Halifax, Regina, and Edmonton in 1999 and in Montreal in 2000. Shortly after this flurry of temple construction, the Vancouver Temple was dedicated in 2010, followed by Calgary’s in 2012. The Winnipeg Temple is scheduled for completion in 2015 or 2016.

This same diffusion of Latter-day Saints beyond Alberta’s border is also demonstrated by the proliferation of LDS stakes. The first, in Cardston, was created in 1895, followed by the Raymond Stake (1903), the Calgary Stake (1921), and the Lethbridge Stake (1951). The first Latter-day Saint stake outside of Alberta, the Toronto Stake, was formed in 1960. Since then, the number of LDS stakes has continued to proliferate, demonstrating the growth and dispersal of Mormons throughout Canada after World War II. While there were eight stakes in 1960, there were ten by 1970, twenty-six in 1980, thirty-four in 1990, forty-four in 2000, and forty-seven in 2010, reflecting a slight trailing-off in the expansion or growth rate of the LDS in recent years.

These statistics cannot be debated like those of the numbers of Latter-day Saints. There are always charges of overreporting with respect to Church statistics, and there are certain structural problems with how the census gathers religious data, leading to underrepresentation of smaller religious groups, in particular. But no matter what statistics one draws upon, a few trends are clear. Since the Second World War, the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada has been impressive. Those claiming they were Latter-day Saints surged by 30 percent in the 1940s to over 32,000, by 52


LDS statistics show a growth rate similar to the Canada census statistics but suggest that the number of Latter-day Saints in Canada in 2011 is about 180,000.
percent in the 1950s to just over 50,000, by 33 percent in the 1960s to 66,000, and by 23 percent in the 1970s to 88,000. Growth trailed off in the 1980s; still those identifying themselves as Latter-day Saints in 1991 had grown by over 13 percent to 100,765. In the 1990s, however, growth almost halted. According to the census, the number of Canadians claiming to be Latter-day Saints in 2001 was 101,895, an increase of a mere 1.2 percent.

Despite this disheartening trend, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Canada is very successful in maintaining its converts. Participation rates, in the form of weekly attendance at church, marriage in the temple, and ordination, are in the 40–50 percent range, a figure much higher than the participation rates for most of the major churches in Canada. Growth may have slowed, but these numbers are not slipping into absolute decline as they are for another uniquely American religion in Canada, the Pentecostals.

It is in this context of growth that I am going to take up the work of Rodney Stark, a sociologist who has had an immense influence on Mormon studies. But I am not going to comment on his stunning predictions concerning the potential future growth of the Mormon faith. Instead, I want to explore his arguments with regard to the growth of new religions and the issue of secularization. Stark argued that the greatest potential for Mormon growth in Canada was among those who responded on the census form that they had “no religion.” In places where church attendance was low and where the historic or conventional churches were faltering, Stark saw opportunities for successful missionary work and growth for the LDS Church. In Canada, he recommended that missionaries be sent to

---

22 Explaining the recent struggles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is difficult. See, for example, Ryan Cragun and Ronald Lawson, “The Secular Transition: The Worldwide Growth of Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists,” Sociology of Religion 71, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 349–73.


the unchurched boomtowns of the West.\textsuperscript{25}

According to census data, “no religion” is one of the fastest growing “ faiths” in Canadian society.\textsuperscript{26} In 2001, almost 4.8 million people, representing just over 16 percent of the population claimed “no religion.”\textsuperscript{27} In 1991, 3.3 million or 12 percent of the population indicated that they had “no religion.” These figures represent a startling growth from 1961, when a mere 49,000 (under 1 percent of the Canadian population) claimed they had “no religion.” By 1971, more than 900,000—4.3 percent of the population—indicated that they had “no religion.” The period of take-off for this category was the tumultuous 1960s.\textsuperscript{28} Indeed, the very fact that the census thought it necessary to include this option indicated that attitudes were fundamentally shifting. If nothing else, it was becoming respectable for people to claim they had no religious affiliation as opposed to being members or followers of one of Canada’s historic churches.

Perhaps even more stunning is that “no religion” stands third, after Roman Catholic (12.7 million) and all the major Protestant faiths and churches (8.6 million). In terms of individual churches, “no


\textsuperscript{27}See \textit{Statistics Canada}, 2001 Census: Analysis Series Religions in Canada, May 2003, http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/canada.cfm#rc (accessed May 16, 2012). Not all those reporting “no religion” were refugees from Canada’s historic churches. Immigration was also a factor. Many born in China or Hong Kong, for example, reported “no religion.”

religion,” is the second largest church in Canada, following the Roman Catholic Church but significantly outpacing the historic United Church of Canada (2.8 million), Anglican Church (2.2 million), Baptist Church (0.7 million), Lutheran Church (0.6 million), and the once-powerful and pervasive Presbyterian Church (0.4 million). Rodney Stark is correct in pointing out that western Canada in particular has large numbers of “no religion” citizens. In British Columbia, “no religion” is far and away the most populous religious category, according to the census; just over 35 percent claim no religious affiliation. The number in Alberta is also well above the national average, with 23 percent of Albertans claiming they have no religious affiliation.

Many people who claim they have no religious affiliation identify themselves as being “spiritual but not religious.” The distinction between “religious” and “spiritual” is crucial to the monumental religious change of the post-1945 period. Being religious is associated with going to church and accepting its authority, along with that of clergy, with respect to creeds, worship practices, and moral teachings. “Religious” is increasingly associated with the “public realm of membership in religious institutions, participation in formal ritual[,] and adherence to official denominational doctrine.” It has negative connotations that are increasingly associated with

29 In 1925, the United Church of Canada was formed, an organic union of the Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches in Canada. Church union was very controversial among the Presbyterians, approximately one-third of whom refused to enter the union and maintained membership in the Presbyterian Church in Canada. For that story, see N. Keith Clifford, The Resistance to Church Union in Canada, 1904–1939 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985).


things authoritarian, bureaucratic, and tired.32

Being spiritual, in many respects, is a dissent against church-based religion, a post-modern religiosity. Churches are regarded as a barrier to true spiritual development, for they impede spiritual inquiry and stultify new insights. For the spiritually inclined, the location of religious authority rests within each individual. They select or choose whatever beliefs and rituals they find consistent with their individual ideals, moral code, spiritual needs, and sense of the world. They are constantly questioning and searching for enlightenment about the ways of God and the meaning of life, and they do so outside of any institutional framework. For them, spiritual life is a highly individualized journey taken outside the churches. In denying the validity of church as a center of spiritual life, they reject churches as legalistic, bureaucratic, and conventional—empty of spiritual meaning and life. In this post-modernist age, “spiritual” is associated with the private realm of religious thought and experience—something that is genuine, positive, and fulfilling.33 Put another way, religion is associated with belief in prescribed doctrines, and spirituality is associated with inner faith.34 The growing numbers claiming to be spiritual but not religious (or to have “no religion”) reject the practice of belonging to or attending a church. The old Canada of dedicated church-going and life-long denominational affiliation that grounded a deep sense of personal and family identity is a category of self-identification of ever-diminishing importance in recent surveys of religion in Canada.35

The decline of the mainstream Protestant churches in Canada has been nothing short of catastrophic. The five Protestant churches that have been historically dominant—the Anglican Church, United Church of Canada, Presbyterian Church, Baptist Church, and Lutherans—made up 95 percent of the Protestant population prior to 1945. Very few Canadians belonged to smaller evangelical, charismatic, or restoration churches, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Christian

33Ibid.
and Missionary Alliance, Pentecostals, or Jehovah’s Witnesses. This situation remained stable until the late 1950s and early 1960s when the proportion of the historic mainstream church affiliation began to trail off. Over 2.5 million Canadians reported themselves as Anglican in 1971; by 2001, that number had dropped to just over 2.0 million. Similarly over 1 million Anglicans, according to its own records, were active members in the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s. But by 2001 only 640,000 were active Anglican members. Similar figures exist for the United Church of Canada. By 1971, 3.7 million Canadians claimed affiliation with the United Church. By 2001, 2.8 million people claimed affiliation, a stunning drop of 1 million. But this shrinkage was more dramatic in terms of active members, including Sunday School enrolment. In 1961, there were just under 1.8 million active members of the United Church of Canada; and by 2001, that figure had plummeted to 760,000. From 1971, the historic mainstream in Canada began to experience absolute, not just relative decline. Only the Baptists enjoyed growth over these decades.36

Where did these people go? Some, no doubt, were swept up in the evangelical revival of the recent decades. But the number of conservative evangelicals in contemporary Canada amounted to approximately 10 percent of the population in 1961 and peaked at just over 17 percent in 1991. This significant growth does not compensate for the decline of the historic mainstream. In many cases, the ranks of those claiming they have “no religion” have come from Canada’s historic mainstream churches.37

Many people still claim religious affiliation with the historic churches for reasons of identity or tradition, but they, too, harbor


many of the attitudes of those who claim “no religion.” In other words, if we take the low church attendance figures into account, it may be that the characteristics attributed to many in the “no religion” category also apply to many who do not attend regularly but who still claim denominational affiliation. Recent surveys of Canadian attitudes toward religion estimate that 40 percent of Canadians consider themselves “spiritual but not religious.” As this figure is much greater than the “no religion” claimants in the census, it must include many people who still maintain some degree of church affiliation or identification.

The rise of those claiming they have no religion and the precipitous decline of the mainstream Protestant churches is only the tip of the iceberg of religious change in post-1945 Canada. Many who still declare their attachment to a certain church or denomination attend only sporadically. Regular church-going in Canada has plummeted since the 1960s. Gallup polls suggest, that while 67 percent of adult Canadians reported attending church regularly in 1947, a decade later in 1957, that percentage had sagged to 53. This dramatic decline has persisted—down to 31 percent in 1975 and 23 percent in 1991. Only recently has this figure leveled off, but perhaps it can be argued that church attendance in Canada cannot decline much more.38

Of course, church attendance is a rather blunt instrument to measure the religiosity of a society, for it captures only one aspect of people’s religious lives. Making any claims for secularization is dubious if it is based solely on weekly attendance at worship service. An index of religion has been developed based on five different factors: (1) religious affiliation, (2) frequency of church attendance, (3) fre-
quency of private religious practice, including prayer, meditation, or reading sacred texts, (4) importance of religion to one’s life, and finally (5) belief in certain key doctrines such as the existence of God, the divinity of Christ, and the efficacy of prayer. Someone with a low level of religiosity does not attend church, engage in private religious devotion, or place importance on religion in his or her life, while someone with a very high level of religious commitment attends church regularly, practices private religious devotions regularly, and places very high importance on religion in his or her life. Based on these criteria, according to *Canadian Social Trends*, 40 percent of Canadians have a low degree of religiosity, and 31 percent have a moderate degree of religiosity. Only 29 percent have a high degree of religiosity. This much more sensitive instrument has only confirmed the dramatic decline of church-going though, at the same time, making it clear that many Canadians still practice religion privately.\(^39\) But the basic trend seems to be a continuing slump in religious engagement.

Other surveys only add to this dismal picture. Recent Gallup polls have found that approximately 66 percent of Canadians answer “no” to either one of the following questions: “Do you happen to be a member of a church, synagogue or mosque?” or “Apart from weddings, funerals, or special holidays such as Christmas, Easter, or Yom Kippur, have you attended the church, synagogue, or mosque of your choice in the past six months?” On the latter question alone, only 43 percent of Canadians answered positively. The majority of Canadians, therefore, can be considered “unchurched.”\(^40\)

Equally important in Canada’s changing religious landscape is the growing number and visibility of non-Christian religions. In 1951


Catholics amounted to 45 percent of the population and Protestants 52 percent, for a total Christian population of an overwhelming 97 percent. Changes in Canadian immigration policy ending discrimination based on race or ethnicity led to a rise of non-Christian immigrants arriving in Canada in increasing numbers after 1960. Indeed a profound shift in Canadian immigrant patterns has occurred. The primary source of immigration to Canada is not only the countries of Christian Europe but also those of non-Christian Asia and the Middle East. By 1991, the total Protestant population had fallen to 36 percent, while the Catholic population remained steady at 45 percent, reflecting that the majority of immigrants from European countries after 1945 came from Catholic countries such as Italy, Poland, and Portugal.

Still, it is important to note—first, Catholics now outnumber Protestants in Canada, and second, the total Christian population had fallen to 81 percent by 1991, which is still dominant but not nearly as overwhelming as it was a generation ago in the 1950s. Most significant, however, is the growing number of Canadians who religiously affiliate with one of the other major world religions, such as Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, or Sikh. The growth of these faiths in Canada is consistent with the changing immigration pattern toward people from Asia and the Middle East. While the percentage of immigrants of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Sikh background was negligible before 1961, it reached 18 percent of immigrants for the census decade 1971–81 and 24 percent of all immigrants between 1981 and 1991. Over the next decade, just over 15 percent of immigrants to Canada were Muslims, and another 15 percent were Buddhists, Hindus, or Sikhs. Between 1981 and 1991, the number of Canadians identifying with one of these non-Christian world religions rose by 144 percent.


42The best introductions to these world religions in Canada are Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds., *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada* (Toronto: Pearson Canada, 2005) and Jamie Scott, ed., *The Religions of Canadians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).
with the largest increase among the Buddhists (215 percent), Muslims (158 percent), Hindus (126 percent), and Sikhs (118 percent).

This trend continued between 1991 and 2001 with growth rates of 129 percent among Muslims, 89 percent among both Hindus and Sikhs, and 84 percent among Buddhists. In total, according to the 2001 census, there were approximately 580,000 Muslims living in Canada and just over 300,000 Buddhists, the same number of Hindus, and around 290,000 Sikhs.\(^{43}\) The overall number of Canadians professing to be Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Sikh is still modest. But if current immigration patterns persist, then these religions will continue to outpace the growth of Christianity in Canada and will continue to become an ever-increasing proportion of the country.\(^{44}\) Moreover, these non-Christian immigrants tend to concentrate in Canada’s major cities, making their presence or visibility more pronounced.

This rise of world or eastern religions in Canada can be overplayed, for the percentage of the major non-Christian religions in Canada is still quite small. Non-Christian religions—Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Confucianism, and other Chinese religions—amount to less than 10 percent of the total Canadian population.\(^{45}\) According to some commentators, the idea that Canada is a post-Christian society should be treated with caution, and it is premature

---


\(^{45}\)I have not included Jews in this analysis, for their story is strikingly different. Although there was Jewish immigration to Canada after World War II, the Jewish community in Canada had deeper roots. Much of the Jewish migration to Canada occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. After World War II, this well-established Jewish community was entering the highest echelons of Canadian life. Indeed, Jews played a major role in the fight for human rights and equality legislation in Canada leading up to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. See Gerald Tulchinsky, Canada’s Jews: A People’s Journey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
to drive the final nails into the coffin of Christianity in Canada.\textsuperscript{46} There are strong vestiges of Christian heritage in the faith of those people who are “spiritual but not religious”; and therefore, even this substantial proportion of people is not necessarily an indicator of the end of Christianity in Canada. They may be on the vanguard of a post-modernist Christianity, where church teachings, membership, and worship are far less important. Nevertheless, it is difficult to overplay or exaggerate the demise of the historic mainstream churches in Canadian society. The United Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches have lost considerable clout in Canadian society and have retreated from their earlier roles in public education, health care, social services, and the law.

These changes in Canada’s religious landscape have prompted one American historian of religion to ask “What Happened to Christian Canada?”\textsuperscript{47} This question presumes Christianity’s demise and the emergence of a secular or post-Christian society. Certainly if one defines secularization as the decline or marginalization of religion in the public sphere, then Canada has become a profoundly secular society since at least 1960.\textsuperscript{48}


But to understand the full extent of the changes in the Canadian religious landscape it is necessary to look beyond immigration and the religious affiliation of Canadians. Also driving the change toward a more secular direction are the ways in which Canadian society has responded to the fact of greater religious diversity. Constitutional change in the form of the landmark 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms was prompted by recognition of Canada’s multi-cultural and diverse religious character. The charter has moved Canada further in a secular direction and away from some of its early Christian roots. In particular, court decisions with respect to religion based on the Charter have had a profound impact on moving religion out of the public square in Canadian society.

It should be noted that, deeply rooted in Canadian history, lies a certain uneasiness or anxiety with respect to the divisive impact of religion in public life. This uneasiness led to the separation of church and state in the 1840s and 1850s when political battles over the status and privileges of the established Church of England were considered too fractious. This determination to separate church from state and insure that no one religion or denomination was favoured was perhaps best seen in the development of the public school system which was vigorously nondenominational. But a more general apprehension about mixing religion with politics in Canada also surfaced early in its history as a result of numerous disputes between Protestants and Catholics. Indeed, in recognition that basic diversity of Canada necessitated important compromises, one Father of Confederation, Georges Étienne Cartier, announced during the debates about confederation that Canada could not be a nation based on religion, language, or ethnicity. The new nation, Cartier declared, had to be a “political nationality.”

The wisdom of Cartier’s observation was quickly seen as numerous Protestant-Catholic conflicts erupted over questions of minority rights with respect to religion, primarily, and also language. The most notable of these conflicts involved the mixed Native and French-speaking Catholic Metis people, leading to the Red River Uprising of

1870 and the North West Rebellion of 1885. Both events tore the national fabric asunder along religious lines, therefore exposing the folly of mixing politics with religion in Canadian society.

During World War II, many Canadians embraced the idea of defining and codifying fundamental human rights and freedoms as articulated by Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt in their statement of war aims, the Atlantic Charter. These goals were institutionalized by the newly created United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The more vociferous exponents of civil rights in Canada pointed to Canada’s multi-cultural character and religious diversity as reasons for making such a document necessary in Canada. The internment of the Japanese and subsequent confiscation of their West Coast property, deeply rooted in racism as well as the fears of Japanese militarism during World War II, was dramatic evidence of such a need.\(^50\) The treatment of religious minorities, such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses was further evidence that the rights revolution had to be extended to religious minorities. In Quebec, Jehovah’s Witnesses were forbidden to hold any kind of assembly, due to their aggressive and anti-Catholic missionary zeal; and in Ontario, Jehovah’s Witness children were taken from families because they refused to salute the flag and sing the national anthem during patriotic opening exercises at school.\(^51\) Questions of civil rights were directly linked to the country’s emerging multi-cultural character and religious diversity in Canada.

The struggle for a charter for rights and freedoms in Canada is long and complicated, but the impetus for constitutional reform in the political arena came, in large measure, from Pierre Elliott Trudeau.\(^52\) For Trudeau, Canada’s growing multi-cultural character and episodes of mistreating religious and ethnic minorities confirmed the necessity of having rights and freedoms defined and guaranteed


\(^{52}\) For this background, see Christopher MacLennan, *Toward the Charter: Canadians and the Demand for a National Bill of Rights, 1929–1960* (Mon-
in a written charter. If civil and human rights were written into law, Trudeau reasoned, then they would be guaranteed by the courts, which are not subject to the whims of public opinion as are parliamentarians and politicians.

This debate over civil and human rights in Canada emerged in a period when the state was beginning to remove itself from some of its Christian underpinnings. Before becoming prime minister in 1968, Trudeau served a minister of justice in the administration of the Liberal Prime Minister Lester Pearson. In that capacity, he seized upon the question of individual rights with respect to sexual orientation, reproduction, and divorce. In 1967, legislation created “no-fault divorce” and removed homosexuality and contraception from the Criminal Code. In taking this step, Trudeau was indicating that these things were not necessarily “sinful” but were, instead, a matter of individual conscience. In defending these amendments, Trudeau, in his typically provocative manner, stated: “There is no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation.”53 In effect, he was separating matters long regarded as matters of Christian morality from their religious foundation and separating the state from some of its Christian moorings.

Trudeau’s determination to separate church from state persisted in his fight for a charter of rights and freedoms. The constitutional proposals Trudeau brought forward beginning in the early 1970s did not contain any reference to God.54 During the protracted and sometimes fierce debates over Trudeau’s constitutional proposals in the early 1980s, lobbying for inclusion of a reference to God finally moved Trudeau to suggest privately to the Liberal caucus that he did not

think “God gives a damn whether he was in the constitution or not.”

It is tempting to dismiss Trudeau as a liberal secular humanist, as many of his critics at the time charged. But his commitment to the complete separation of church and state and his understanding that constitutions should be secular were not the result of a secular worldview. In fact—although this was not appreciated during his lifetime—Trudeau remained a very devout Catholic throughout his life. He was a liberal, and perhaps postmodern Christian, insisting that religion should be relegated to the private sphere and stressing that religion had no role in the public square. Religion was too divisive and when it impinged on public policy, it often trampled upon people’s freedom, according to Trudeau.

Not surprisingly, the conservative evangelical churches, along with the Catholic church, expressed dismay about the lack of reference to God in such an important national document, and one that arguably defined its character. In pressing for reference to God in any constitutional amendment, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada asserted that “human rights though recognized by the state in a democratic society are a sacred endowment from God, not bestowed . . . by the state.”

The preamble of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms opens with the phrase: “Whereas Canada is founded upon principles


57Egerton, “Trudeau, God and the Canadian Constitution,” 104. By contrast, the United and Anglican churches did not call for the inclusion of a reference to God in the preamble of the Constitution.
that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law . . .” It sug-
gests that Trudeau had relented and that his secular understanding
had suffered a defeat from those who resisted the separation of
church and state and removal of religion from the public sphere. But
Trudeau’s opponents enjoyed only a pyrrhic victory, for what mat-
tered was not the language in the preamble but how the courts inter-
preted the charter’s provisions, especially Sections 2 and 15.

Briefly, Section 2(a) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms
states: “Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: (a) free-
dom of conscience and religion.” And this freedom of religion, under
Section 1 is “subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law
as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.”
Section 15 guarantees that “every individual is equal before the law
and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal
benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without
discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, reli-
gion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.”

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms opened a new chapter in
Canadian history. It did not take long for cases to reach the Supreme
Court of Canada that required interpretation of the religious freedom
and equality clauses. Indeed, in certain cases, people deliberately chal-
lenged long-standing legislation, such as the Lord’s Day Act—legisla-
tion dating from the early twentieth century that was designed to pro-
tect the sanctity of Sunday or the Sabbath from unnecessary commer-
cial enterprise, amusement, and entertainment. Other challenged
practices were religious exercises and instruction in schools, to see
what the provisions of the Charter entailed. Some of the basic laws and
practices of Canadian society with respect to the role of religion in so-
ciety would now be tested through the prism of the freedom and
equality sections of the new document, which is considered to be part
of the Canadian constitution and, for most Canadians, by far the most
important part.

One of the first cases considered by the Supreme Court of Can-
ada under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms dealt with Canada’s Lord’s Day Act. In rendering the court’s decision, Chief Justice Brian Dickson wrote a judgment that outlined one of the new cardinal principles of Canadian society under the charter: “The essence of the concept of freedom of religion is the right to entertain such religious beliefs as a person chooses, the right to declare religious beliefs openly and without fear or hindrance or reprisal, and the right to manifest belief by worship and practice or by teaching and dissemination.” Dickson stressed that the concept of freedom compelled the “absence of coercion or restraint.” Following from this reasoning, he argued that the Lord’s Day Act “works a form of coercion inimical to the Charter” because it “takes religious values rooted in Christian morality and, using the force of the State, translates them into a positive law binding on believers and non-believers alike. The theological content of the legislation remains as a subtle and constant reminder to religious minorities within the country of their differences with, and alienation from, the dominant religious culture.” Thus, in one of its first major decisions regarding religion, one of the legislative cornerstones of the country’s Christian heritage, the Lord’s Day Act, was removed and the informal ties between church and state in Canada were separated. Moreover, Dickson seemed to approve of an interpretation of the charter that endorsed a secular direction. “In an earlier time,” he wrote, “the enforcement of religious conformity may have been a legitimate object of government, but since the Charter, it has become the right of every Canadian to work out for himself or herself what his or her religious obligation, if any, should be and it is not for the state to dictate otherwise.” In a sense, Dickson was suggesting that the charter’s guarantee of religious freedom liberated people from the shackles of church-imposed and state-sanctioned religion. Here was a constitutional sanction for the exodus from the church that was underway in Canadian society.

The secular revolution that was implicit in Dickson’s ruling was challenged by Mr. Justice Belzil’s dissenting opinion in the pre-

---

ceding 1985 decision of the Alberta Court of Appeal. He had argued that the Lord’s Day Act did not compel observation of the Lord’s Day by either Christians or non-Christians. “With the Lord’s Day eliminated, will not all reference in the statutes to Christmas, Easter or Thanksgiving be next? . . . Such an interpretation would make the Charter an instrument for the repression of the majority at the instance of every dissident and result in an amorphous, rootless, and godless nation contrary to the recognition of the supremacy of God declared in the preamble. The ‘living tree’ will wither if planted in sterile soil.”

In 1990, another landmark decision seemed to confirm this fear. The Supreme Court ruled on religious holidays in the schools—an issue that is still heated in Canadian society. In 1990, the Islamic Schools Federation of Ontario along with a Muslim student challenged the Ottawa Board of Education’s refusal to recognize Islamic holidays in schools. They sought reciprocity with other religions, whose holidays served as the basis for breaks in the school calendar on such Christian holy days as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Thanksgiving. The applicants sought “reasonable accommodation” in those schools where the number of students of the Islamic faith justified some recognition of Islamic holy days as school holidays. When the board refused to consider this request, the complainants interpreted it as a denial of religious freedom and equality under the charter. In the court’s ruling, Chief Justice Dickson made an important distinction between the origin and purpose of school holidays. He recognized that holidays such as Christmas and Easter were historically celebrated for religious reasons. But now, he argued, those religious reasons have been seriously diminished. The main purpose of these holidays, he suggested, was the “perceived need of people to have days away from work or school in common with family, friends and other members of the community.” According to Dickson, it was a social fact that these holidays were now primarily secular in nature and not a matter of religious observance. It is now public school practice, he argued, to cease declaring Christmas, Good Friday, and Ea-

---

Michael Valpy, a columnist who writes frequently on religious matters in Canada’s national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail* published in Toronto, has argued that schools should not necessarily close for religious holy days, whether Christian, Orthodox, Jewish, or Islamic. “I think it is time religion was relegated to private culture,” he declared. “If you want your family to observe your own religious holy days, pull your kids out of school—which the Jews have been doing forever. It’s a no-fuss, no-muss idea.”

Religious holidays no longer form the basis of school holidays in the school calendar. The overlapping of school breaks and religious holidays is merely incidental or at most a matter of well-established practice that cannot be changed without disrupting the annual rhythms of family life in Canada. The Supreme Court’s decision acknowledged and further hastened the increasingly secular character of Canadian society.

The secular implications of these decisions that are designed to accommodate religious diversity in Canadian society are perhaps most visible at Christmas, which has become a very contentious holiday in Canadian society. Although fewer Canadians attach a strong religious purpose to Christmas or attend church services regularly throughout the Advent and Christmas season, they still cherish the Christmas season as a time to renew family ties and strengthen commitments to peace, goodwill, and charity. Veneration for the rituals of Christmas is as much, if not more, nostalgic than religious or devotional. This nostalgia is powerful, and there is great discontent whenever Christmas traditions are tampered with. When town councils ban nativity scenes in public buildings or public squares and when schools ban Christmas decorations and the annual Christmas concert—a mainstay of local Christmas celebrations in Canada—in favour of secular winter festivites there is an outcry of an-
guish and a keen sense of loss.\textsuperscript{65}

Schools as much as churches inculcate values; and therefore, what is taught and practiced in schools is a matter of keen and abiding interest. Many of the charter-based challenges regarding religion in Canadian society, therefore, emanated from what was occurring in schools. Two cases in particular shifted the place of religion in Canadian schools in a far-reaching fashion. In Sudbury, Ontario, as in many other districts, students regularly recited the Lord’s Prayer as part of the opening exercises for the school day, but a child could be exempted if the parents wished. Nevertheless, a group of parents challenged the constitutionality of reciting the Lord’s Prayer in the schools on the grounds that it violated the Charter’s guarantee of freedom of religion. The justices of the Supreme Court of Ontario Court of Appeal, drawing on Chief Justice Dickson’s previous rulings, found that such religious exercises imposed pressure on students and their parents to conform to the religious practices of the majority. They argued that “peer-pressure and class-room norms” represented “real and pervasive pressure” to which children are “acutely sensitive,” thereby potentially compelling them to participate in a religious exercise that they do not believe in. Second, they argued that if parents did seek an exemption for their child, this infringed on their religious freedom by requiring them to make a public declaration with regard to their faith.\textsuperscript{66}

These same principles were applied in another court challenge relating to religious instruction in the classroom. In Elgin County, Ontario, religious instruction was exclusively Christian and taught by


members of the local Bible study club. Teaching only Christianity to
the exclusion of all other faiths, the courts ruled, was a form of coer-
cion and placed a direct burden on religious minorities and nonbe-
lievers. Here again, the courts stipulated that the provision of an ex-
emption allowing those students who did not want to receive religious
instruction to leave the classroom did not eliminate the element of co-
ercion. Indoctrination, the court ruled, involved the sponsoring of
one particular religious belief or devotional practice. Teaching only
one religion had the effect of teaching the student what to believe and
compelling the student to conform to one particular belief.\footnote{67}

What is significant in all these cases is that the courts thought it appropriate
to remove religion from the public square to ensure that there was
true religious freedom and no coercion.

Not surprisingly, other religious minorities tested the secular
orientation of public schools in Canada. A group of devout parents
from a variety of Christian and non-Christian faiths—Muslim, Sikh,
Hindu, Christian Reformed, and Mennonite—contended that the sec-
ular program of study in the public school system was not religiously
neutral; and as a consequence, it was coercive and undermined the
religious values they wished to be instilled in their children. These
parents claimed that a secular schools system violated their firm de-
sire to educate their children with a foundation in religious values and
sought the opportunity to establish alternative religious schools with-
in the public system. As things stood, parents could establish a faith-
based school but they had to support such a school with tuition or
fees. These schools were not part of the public system and therefore
not eligible for state funding. In their view, having to pay money to
send their children to school, while other parents did not, was a viola-
tion of the equality rights outlined in the charter. They believed they
were being discriminated against, especially when they considered
the existence of separate Catholic schools in Ontario that did receive
state support.\footnote{68}

These parents sought similar state funding for their faith-based
schools. In a curt ruling to this challenge, the court denied that secu-

\footnote{67} Canadian Civil Liberties Association v. Ontario (Minister of Education)
(accessed August 8, 2012).

\footnote{68} The separate Catholic school system in Ontario is deeply rooted in
lar schools had any bias. “Secularism,” Justice Winkler of the Ontario court ruled, “is not coercive, it is neutral.” Since the public school system was secular, then no one religion was favoured and teaching lacked any religious indoctrination.\textsuperscript{69} Secularization was characterized as being value free. The courts did not overrule the right of parents to send their children to faith-based schools but firmly ruled against state support or public funding for such schools.

These early Supreme Court decisions have created a framework for the emergence of a “closed secular society,” where religion is banished from the public square largely because it is regarded as something inherently divisive in a multi-cultural society. The most notable incident demonstrating this closed secular society occurred in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the United States. Three days later, a memorial service was held on Parliament Hill, the largest public vigil in Canadian history. No religious content whatsoever was included in the service. Although leaders from all faiths were present and participated, the vigil had no prayers or readings from scripture. Many Canadians complained to their MPs about the lack of a religious

Canadian history. In the mid-nineteenth century, the nondenominational public system eschewed any doctrinal teaching as being far too divisive. But religious exercises consisting of prayer and Bible reading were allowed and the Bible was used in the classroom for moral instruction and reading lessons. For the growing number of Irish Catholics, these public schools were Protestant in character and spirit. A separate state-supported Catholic system was introduced to meet these Catholic protests. At Confederation in 1867, minority educational rights were guaranteed for Catholics in Ontario and those for Protestants in overwhelmingly Catholic Quebec. This principle of minority educational rights through dual Protestant and Catholic school systems became one of the cardinal principles of the Canadian nation and it was established in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta as Canada expanded westward. This fundamental duality of Protestant and Catholic was also constantly contested. The literature on this complicated issue is vast, but a good place to start is Lois Sweet, \textit{God in the Classroom: The Controversial Issue of Religion in Canada’s Schools} (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997). See also, Teri-Lyn Kay Brennan, “Roman Catholic Schooling in Ontario: Present Challenges, Future Direction?,” \textit{Canadian Journal of Education} 34, no. 4 (2011): 20–33.

\textsuperscript{69}Bal \textit{v. Ontario (A.G.)} 1994 21 O.R. (3d) 681 (Ontario Court—General Division).
element on such a somber occasion. In defending the decision that religious leaders had no official role at the vigil service, Prime Minister Jean Chretien told his caucus that keeping church and state or religion and politics separate was the “best decision he made after September 11.” Apart from the very tense religious atmosphere that existed in the wake of the bombings, Chretien stressed how inappropriate anything but the absolute separation of church-state was in Canadian society in defending his position. In the interest of being inclusive and not offending anyone, religion must be completely removed from the public square, he urged. The result is that religion risks either disappearing or being reduced to a vague spirituality for all believers—a spirituality that is devoid of any religious content or meaning.

This incident exposed the increasingly troubling question of how far Christians in Canada should accommodate the new reality of religious diversity. This issue gets to the heart of the troubling question of the elusive Canadian identity. For many, the weakness of mainstream Christianity and the historic churches in Canada becomes most evident in these public debates. Certainly it seems as though the forces of secularization are prevailing, at least over those of the historic mainstream Christian churches in Canada.

A particularly telling incident was the aftermath of the September 1998 crash of Swiss Air flight 111 off the shores of Nova Scotia, in which 229 perished. A memorial service was held at Peggy’s Cove months after the tragedy. The local United Church minister and Catholic priest, who had been invited to say the blessing and opening prayer, were instructed by the protocol officer from the Prime Minister’s office to make no overt reference to the Christian faith—specifically, not to utter the name “Jesus Christ” or quote from the Bible. By contrast a Jewish rabbi read from the Torah, a Muslim recited from the Koran, and a Native leader referred to the “Great Spirit.” What is perhaps most striking is that the Christian leaders complied with the request. It is as though Canada has become uncomfortable with

---


71 Licia Corbella, “Christ’s Name Banned from Memorial Service,” Calgary Sun, December 13, 1998; Lois Wilson, “Why Jesus Wasn’t Mentioned at the Swissair Service,” Toronto Globe and Mail, January 22, 1999. For this and other incidents, see Joe Woodard, “Christianity Becoming a
its Christian heritage for fear of offending the growing number of non-Christians. The vocabulary of Christianity and the Bible is exiled from the public square.

To understand these recent events, we need to review another set of rulings made by the Supreme Court of Canada involving religious minorities, specifically Jews and Seventh-day Adventists, with respect to time off for religious observances or holidays. The court established a distinction between direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination involved refusal to hire someone, for example, based on a particular matter of identity such as race, gender, or religion. Indirect discrimination involved the imposition of rules or norms that applied to all but nevertheless had a restrictive or deleterious impact on those for whom such norms or practices did not apply. Such rules were discriminatory and therefore accommodation had to be found. In the case of Jews and Seventh-day Adventists, accommodation had to be found for their understanding of the Sabbath. The contours of “reasonable accommodation” were initially tested with respect to one of the central symbols of the Canadian nation, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Consistent with the country’s multicultural identity in 1990, the federal government amended the regulation on officers’ uniforms so that male Sikh officers could wear turbans. Officials thought that such accommodation would help to integrate a significant minority into the norms and institutions of Canadian society without having to sacrifice their religious principles or practices. Efforts by retired RCMP officers to have this legislation overturned by the courts failed; the courts that ruled that such an accommodation was reasonable did not alter the RCMP uniform too radically; and, even with turbans, the uniforms still identified Sikh officers as members of the force.

Nowhere in Canada have these issues been more hotly debated than in Quebec, which is always most vulnerable and sensitive to questions of identity, especially in relation to matters of language and religion.72 The practice of “reasonable accommodation” became a matter of protracted controversy in Quebec and exposed the folly of assuming that religion can be confined exclusively to the private


72 For the historical background to Quebec history and nationalism, see Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, Dream of Nation: Social and Intellectual History of Quebec (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982) and Peter Gossage and J. I. Little,
Canadians deal with many daily matters regarding people’s personal religious faith because religious beliefs often have public manifestations in terms of ritualized performances, behaviour, and dress. In March 2006, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Gurbaj Singh Multani, a Sikh student in Montreal, should be permitted to wear his kirpan, a ceremonial dagger, to school. Following this ruling, the Quebec Human Rights Commission ruled that requests by Muslim students for prayer rooms on college and university campuses had to be accommodated.

These matters of intensely private religious belief and practice were transformed into public matters that potentially threatened the social order, raised questions about Quebec’s identity, and caused serious social and political conflict. There were many other similar incidents, and it seemed that a clear pattern of accommodation for minority religious rights was emerging. Many feared that Quebec’s Catholic heritage was being undermined and that the minority was beginning to dictate social and religious practices in Quebec society. These incidents attracted a great deal of press attention, much of it about minority rights.

Although many of the incidents were minor, they became a cause célèbre in Quebec society. This growing disquiet over “reasonable accommodation” erupted in January of 2007 in Herouxville, Quebec, a village of about 1,300 with only a few people of minority background. Causing a stir in Quebec and a scandal in other parts of Canada, the village issued a town charter outlining its principles and standards so that immigrants would be able “to integrate socially more easily.” Many of the standards openly challenged the “reasonable accommodation” that had been worked out between minorities and various institutions in Quebec. The underlying message was that it was time to stop letting minorities impose their beliefs and practices on Quebec society. Moreover, the tone was sarcastic and condescending, indicating an attitude that was potentially dangerously intolerant and prejudicial. Not surprisingly, some of the most pointed commentary related to schools and public celebrations. The schools in the region, the charter declared, were aggressively neutral in terms of religion and culture:

In our schools the children cannot carry any weapons real or fake, symbolic or not. The children can sing, play sports, or play in groups. To promote decency and to avoid all discrimination some schools have adopted a dress code that they strongly enforce. For the last few years to draw away from religious influences or orientation no locale is made available for prayer or any other form of incantation. Moreover, in many of our schools no prayer is allowed. We teach more science and less religion. In our scholastic establishments, be they private or public, generally at the end of the year you will possibly see “Christmas Decorations” or “Christmas Trees.” The children might also sing “Christmas Carols” if they want to.73

Still there was an acknowledgement of Quebec’s Christian heritage. In response to gender-based separation of sports, recreational activity, and health care, the Herouxville charter insisted that such ideas or demands were outside community norms and therefore unreasonable requests from any minority. Indeed, the town charter was most specific in making it clear that the onus was on the minority group to make alterations, not on Quebec society to make “reasonable accommodation.” With respect to the workplace, the charter pointed out that the “employers must respect the government laws regarding work conditions. These laws include holidays known and accepted in advance by all employees. These work conditions are negotiated democratically and once accepted both parties accept them.”74 In other words, there was no room or cause for accommodation or negotiation. The charter represented a clear reaction and challenge to the “reasonable accommodation” made at the request of religious minorities in Quebec, such as Orthodox Jews, Sikhs, and Muslims.

Quebec’s politicians embraced this angry and distrustful mood erupting, especially during the 2007 provincial election. “Reasonable accommodation” became a burning issue. Premier Jean Charest articulated the fears and concerns of many in Quebec when he stated during the campaign that Quebec has certain values fundamental to its identity “including the equality of women and men; the primacy

74 Ibid.
of French; and the separation between the state and religion.”75 The implication seemed to be that the character of Quebec society was at risk.

In the meantime, similar issues regarding the accommodation of religious minorities were erupting in the adjoining province of Ontario. Also in 2007, the Conservative leader in Ontario, John Tory, caused a stir by announcing his support for funding faith-based schools in Ontario, provided they followed the standards and curriculum set down by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Tory was signaling that he intended to introduce state funding for Jewish, Sikh, Muslim, and evangelical Christian schools.76 Tory’s declared policy caused a storm of protest and was soundly repudiated during the 2007 Ontario provincial election. The Conservative Party saw its pre-election lead in the polls quickly evaporate. Tory lost his seat and had to relinquish his leadership. Most voters agreed with the Liberal leader and Premier Dalton McGuinty that such a policy would threaten social cohesion because the public sphere had to be free of religion for the province’s diverse religious communities to live together harmoniously. Those opposing the proposal were convinced that funding faith-based schools would have the unfortunate and dangerous consequence of promoting religious intolerance.77

In the aftermath of Quebec’s emotional election campaign, Premier Charest decided to appoint a commission to investigate “accom-


77For an account of the 2007 Ontario provincial election, see David Seljak et al., “Secularization and the Separation of Church and State in Canada,” Canadian Diversity 6, no. 1 (2008): 14–15. Countering this “conven-
modation practices related to cultural differences."\(^{78}\) He appointed as chairs Gerard Bouchard, a sociologist and brother of former Parti Québécois Premier Lucien Bouchard, and Charles Taylor, a McGill University philosopher and leading thinker on questions related to modernity, multiculturalism, and the issue of secularization.\(^{79}\) One of their first observations was the terrible misunderstanding about the incidents of accommodation that were causing so much controversy and disquiet in Quebec. For the most part, events were viewed through the lens of religious stereotypes, a bias that led to what the commissioners regarded as further misunderstanding, deeper distrust, and unnecessarily prejudicial behavior.

In making this observation, Bouchard and Taylor boldly laid the groundwork for challenging the idea of a “closed secular society” that was embedded in many Supreme Court decisions and which was endorsed by those Canadians who insisted that religion be relegated exclusively to the private sphere. The commissioners argued that “cultural and, in particular, religious differences need not be confined to the private domain. To the contrary, they must be freely displayed in public life. The principle underlying this choice is that it is healthiest to display one’s differences and become familiar with those of the Other than to gloss over and marginalize them, which can lead to fragmentation favourable to the formation of stereotypes and fundamentalisms. Moreover, how can we benefit fully from cultural diver-

---


sity if it is partly banned from public space? Insistence on keeping religion out of the public square in the interests of social harmony had the ironic outcome of impeding open communication about religion, which in turn fostered ignorance and mistrust.

Bouchard and Taylor were influenced by some of the monumental changes occurring in Quebec over the last thirty or forty years. Arguably, few societies have secularized as rapidly or as aggressively as Quebec during the past two generations. Sectors of Quebec society that had long been the responsibility of the Catholic Church, such as education, social welfare, and health care, were taken over by the state during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. Accompanying this secularization has been a dramatic drop of Québécois attending mass, entering the priesthood (for men), or joining a religious order.

Further challenges to the traditional role of the Catholic Church in Quebec resulted from the growing diversity of Quebec society. In 1997 a nonconfessional education system was adopted. Catholic and Protestant denominational teaching was replaced by a more general ethics and religious culture program, in which students learned about all religions in a comparative context rather than being exposed to—and indeed proselytized about—only one faith. This new program—although very controversial in more traditional circles—represents what is regarded as “open secularism,” in which the state and other public institutions are open to the importance of the spiritual dimension in people’s lives. The contrasting “closed secular” system would have banished religion. In advocating open secularism, the commissioners explained: “We must, in fact, distinguish between, for example, the wearing by a student of a headscarf—hijab—and denominational (rather than cultural) teaching of religions or the reciting of prayer before classes begin. If we are to accord students equal respect and ensure the institution’s neutrality, the main thing is not to completely remove religion from the school but ensure that the school

---

does not embrace or favour any religion."81 For the religio-cultural hotbed of the public school system, this more open secularism meant that “denominational teaching” was “replaced by a program that allows students to acquire the knowledge necessary to understand religious phenomenon and its expressions in Quebec and elsewhere and to develop the skills necessary for cohabitation in the context of diversified society.”82

A great deal is at stake in whether Canada opts for an open or closed form of secularism in navigating the challenges of a highly diversified society. If Canada chooses closed secularism, then it will banish religion to the private sphere, excluding it from public discourse. This continuation along the path of secularization will also have the effect of banishing devout people whose religion is expressed in highly ritualized or symbolic practices. They will exist on the margins of society or in cloisters of their own faith. Such isolation of certain religious groups only increases the risks of religious conflict and acrimony in Canadian society. Choosing open secularism, in contrast, offers a chance for an abatement in the tide of secularization in Canada with the effect that Canadians, no matter what their religious faith, will become more secure and confident about expressing and living their faith to the fullest.

The Supreme Court is now recognizing, as its application of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms continues to evolve, that ways to embrace and celebrate religious diversity in Canada must be found. One way may be the injunction that, while there can be no religious instruction in schools, there can be instruction about religion.83 In other words, the court has developed an important distinction between teaching a religion and teaching about religion. Indeed the only way that Canada is going to develop a tolerant society in which all

religions can thrive is to find the “reasonable accommodation” that they are striving for in Quebec.

These controversies over reasonable accommodation helped to crystallize questions that had been simmering in Canadian society over the past decades. Questions about multiculturalism and minority rights had hit a collective nerve. There was a widespread sense of unease about the fragmentation of society into segregated religious and ethnic ghettos—a sense that, whatever the Canadian identity was, it was being seriously compromised by too many or too far-reaching accommodations to ethno-religious minorities. In addition to wondering about how much accommodation Canada, the host society, should extend to newcomers, many were posing a related question ever more frequently and in ever-more urgent tones: How much should Canada ask of its immigrants? The issue of reasonable accommodation in essence had become a question of identity. What kind of society do Canadians want to live in? Where religion is concerned, the primary issue is not whether people from religious or ethnic minorities should be allowed to wear their turbans, kippas, hijabs, ceremonial swords, or other outward signs of religious identity. Instead the fundamental question is whether people from other cultural and religious backgrounds will embrace Canadian values, such as those outlined and enshrined in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including “religion as a private matter, respect for democracy and free speech, and the rejection of all forms of discrimination based on race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.”

THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN CONTEMPORARY CANADA

Where do the Latter-day Saints fit into this landscape of religious life in Canada? Of course, it is difficult to know, for literature on the Mormon faith on Canada is not well developed. However, there are some striking similarities between the outlook of the contemporary “religious nones” and the foundations of the Mormon faith. A cornerstone of Joseph Smith’s beliefs and determination to create a newly restored church came during the First Vision when he was told that all the churches and “all their creeds were an abomination” (JS—H 1:19). As Richard Bushman explains, Smith understood the

First Vision to be a message encouraging him to avoid the decay and corruption of the churches around him, for they had fallen into apostasy that was both doctrinal and moral. 85

A similar view is held today by many seeking a more enlightened spiritual life outside the churches. The LDS lack of professional clergy—and, hence, reliance on lay leadership for worship services, spiritual practice, and pastoral care—makes the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seem remarkably appealing to the anti-authoritarian outlook of those with no religious affiliation. As one commentator has suggested, Mormonism “is all but creedless and stands completely without exegesis.” 86 Furthermore, the Mormon faith has demonstrated remarkable flexibility throughout its history, its ability to renegotiate plural marriage and millennialism, to cite just two examples, allowing it to remain a vibrant faith.

While these flexible characteristics may be a magnet for some people, other aspects of the Church are probably less attractive to those convinced that true spirituality can be discovered only outside the authority and discipline of an institutional setting. The standardization imposed on Mormon worship and activities makes the LDS Church much like many traditional churches. As Jan Shipps has suggested, this “standardization” seems corporate and the Church “almost a franchise religion.” 87 Thus, its flexibility and heritage of protest and reform are counterbalanced by its emphasis on authority and standardization, making it a difficult choice for many. For those seeking a more enlightened and individualistic spiritual life, they venerate few things more than their freedom and decisively reject authoritarianism that robs them of that very freedom. In short, as attractive as the LDS Church may be, it also presents real barriers and demands that many will find difficult and unacceptable. Contrary to Rodney Stark’s hopeful observation, those cast adrift from the church of their parents and grandparents—and the increasing number who consider

87Shipps, Sojourner in the Promised Land, 272.
themselves spiritual but not religious—are not necessarily fertile soil for LDS activity.\textsuperscript{88}

We get a glimpse of why some Canadians have been attracted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through personal testimony and anecdotal evidence. Ten years ago, Peter Emberly, a professor of philosophy and political science at Carleton University in Ottawa, set out to understand the growing number of Canadians who were on a “spiritual journey.” He understood that these Canadians were looking to “drink from the waters of a living faith” but they were not returning to the churches and temples of their parents and grandparents. To study this “divine hunger,” Emberly went on a quest of his own. In Cardston, Alberta, Emberly spent time with a baby-boomer convert to the LDS Church. He discovered that the Mormon faith appealed to those who were looking to restore the traditions and values they thought had been lost in modern society and the mainstream churches. They were deeply troubled by the endless choice, lack of authority and direction, moral laxity, and empty materialism that had characterized their lives throughout the 1960s and beyond.\textsuperscript{89} These converts, according to Emberly, were seeking “to transform reality by turning back the clock to an imagined time of purity.”\textsuperscript{90}

But a nostalgic quest for a golden age does not fully account for the appeal of Mormonism. Its strength also rests in the stability and certainty it offers at a time when many churches seem to have lost their way and when Canadians are feeling challenged by the growing diversity of religious life that now defines their nation. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provides a comforting sense of religious community, assurance of belief, moral certainty, and family values, which are compelling qualities for those seeking a secure haven in a turbulent, uncertain, and morally vacillating world.\textsuperscript{91}

Some commentators suggest that the new contemporary spiri-

\textsuperscript{88}Here I am consciously echoing the observations on the paradoxical characteristics of the Mormon faith made by Terryl L. Givens, \textit{People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8–15.


\textsuperscript{91}Ibid., 60.
tuality is tantamount to another Great Awakening in the United States or a revitalization of religion in Canada. Religion is not disappearing, they argue; it is moving elsewhere, toward new churches, including the Latter-day Saints, and religious movements that are “better adapted to the new cultural and social situation.”

But real peril exists for any church or religious movement with a strong attachment to its scripture, religious teachings, and worship practices. This new spirituality, especially as practiced by those with “no religion” may be a very weak foundation for the continued strength of religious faith in contemporary society. For many claiming they are spiritual but not religious, God is a vague power or, in a final reduction, merely one’s own conscience. The Bible or other sacred texts such as the Book of Mormon are considered a collection of ethical guidelines or moral tales. Miracles are regarded as myths or metaphors, not as historical episodes. Christ is an exemplary teacher or prophet, merely a man, not divine. Within the new spirituality of contemporary society lies the possibility for the secularization or undermining of religion itself and, as a result, the further secularization of society.

There must be clear limits to the flexibility or adaptations that any church or faith makes to the demands of contemporary society and culture. Certain beliefs, doctrines, and worship practices “constitute the absolute, minimal, unchangeable core of the restored gospel”

---


of the Mormon faith. How much flexibility can there be without sacrificing this core? How much latitude can exist within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to insure that it remains a vibrant and authentic church in a secular and highly diverse society such as Canada? To paraphrase Armand Mauss, which ideas and customs are, in fact, essential to the Mormon faith and which are cultural or national constructs that are open to interpretation or alteration? For the Mormon faith, the deeply secular, highly diverse and very unsettled religious landscape in Canada seems like a very uncertain climate indeed.


96 Ibid.
I AM VERY GRATEFUL TO President Richard L. Jensen and the members of the Mormon History Association executive board for inviting me to be this year’s devotional speaker and to offer some reflections on my service as the Church Historian and Recorder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. After twenty-three and a half years of traveling the world as an itinerant preacher, this is my final address as an active member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and as the Church Historian and Recorder.

In the law, hearsay evidence is normally excludable. However, there is an exception made for “dying declarations.” Second-hand evidence of such statements—made by the declarant in anticipation of death—is usually held to be admissible on the grounds that a person about to die isn’t likely to prevaricate. Since I am about to “expire,” I hope the same presumption of credibility will be accorded my remarks today.

In preparing my talk, I have been conscious of my audience—
those of you who are present this morning and those who may some-
day read what I have written. I have proceeded with my children and
grandchildren especially in mind, hoping that they will someday find
my thoughts interesting and will come better to know and appreciate
a wonderful and fulfilling time in my life.

I feel a compelling need to begin with an expression of apprecia-
tion. The seven years—2005 to 2012—I have been privileged to serve
as Church Historian and Recorder have been filled with challenges
and stresses to be sure, but also with opportunities for significant per-
sonal growth, fulfilling service, and for association with some of the
brightest, and most talented and thoughtful people on earth. If the
late Leonard J. Arrington’s term of service in the Historical Depart-
ment is remembered by some as “ten years in Camelot,” I’d like mine
to be known as “seven years and thanks a lot.” My heart really does
swell with gratitude toward the executives, staff, and missionaries of
the LDS Church History Department and toward those who make up
the communities of Mormon history and Mormon studies. Thanks to
all of you for accepting a “historian by yearning” in place of a “histo-
rian by learning.” I will be forever grateful for the friendship, support,
and respect you have offered me. I humbly and gratefully acknowl-
edge that any accomplishments or progress occurring on my watch in
the Church History Department have been products of cooperative
effort.

My wife, Kathleen, deserves special mention. Her love, unself-
ishness, and spousal “peer review” have been indispensable to my
happiness and whatever success I have achieved since we met and
married forty-five years ago. By becoming a docent at the LDS
Church History Museum on Temple Square several years ago, she be-
gan her own exploration of Church history. It has been very pleasing
to watch her acquire her own knowledge and opinions about histori-
cal themes and issues and to engage at times in lively conversation
with her about Church history. I must also recognize the service of my
devoted secretary, Dorsey Ford. With her oversight at work and
Kathy’s direction at home, I was only at risk as I drove to and from
work each day.

Having expressed the sincere gratitude I feel, I turn now to my
reflections on the time I have served as Church Historian and Re-
corder. I begin with the call that I received from President Gordon B.
Hinckley just prior to April general conference in 2005. As I sat in
President Hinckley’s office, he told me a decision had been made to
fill the vacancy that had existed for some years in the office of Church Historian and Recorder. Elder Dean L. Larsen, the last person to hold the office, had been made an emeritus General Authority and released as Church Historian and Recorder in 1997, but hadn’t actively served in the office since 1989, creating, in effect, a vacancy of sixteen years.

As President Hinckley extended the call, I had the presence of mind to ask him what his expectations of me as Church historian were. He said crisply, “That you read the scriptures and do your duty!” I then asked, “And what about the office of recorder?” He replied, “I haven’t given that a bit of thought, but you’d better!” With that President Hinckley arose, shook my hand, and wished me well. I left wishing I had asked him why the office had been left vacant so long and why they had decided to fill it with me. I guess I’ll never know. I was sustained the next day in general conference and immediately began to read the scriptures and learn my duties, as President Hinckley had advised.

In my reading, I was most impressed with—and came to view as foundational—the Lord’s simple but powerful injunction given to the members of His newly organized Church on April 6, 1830, in Peter and Mary Whitmer’s cabin in Fayette, New York: “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). I’ve pondered that phrase over and over, and I’ve never failed to feel the weight and solemnity of my office whenever I’ve thought about or heard that passage voiced. Each time I walk into the impressive lobby of the LDS Church History Library and see the Lord’s command inscribed in gold letters above the entrance to the large reading room, I am reminded that, in the very beginning, the Lord made it clear that history enjoys a privileged and sacred place in His Church. I may even be guilty of a little pride when I remember that, in those early years of the Church’s existence, there were only three general Church officers—a first elder, Joseph Smith; a second elder, Oliver Cowdery; and the Church Historian and Recorder, also Oliver Cowdery.

Before long, Doctrine and Covenants 47 became my most important guide, even a job description of sorts. Revealed to Joseph Smith for the benefit of a reluctant John Whitmer (who had been asked to succeed Oliver Cowdery), it directs the keeping of a “regular history” (v. 1), authorizes the historian and recorder to “lift up his voice in meetings, whenever it shall be expedient” (v. 2), and confirms John’s appointment to keep “the Church record and history continu-
ally” (v. 3). Most significant for me is the concluding promise that, if faithful, the historian and recorder will be given the Comforter to aid him in discharging his duties (v. 4). Although he later left the Church, John Whitmer performed his duties well in the beginning years of his calling. He even wrote a brief history of the Church’s early years, modestly entitling it “The Book of John Whitmer.” (Rest assured, I have no intention of a similar title for my memoirs.)

Two other scriptures rounded out my view of the historian and recorder’s duties. Doctrine and Covenants 69 provides that in keeping the Church’s history, the historian and recorder should focus on “the important things which he shall observe and know concerning [the] church” (v. 3). It also provides that he may “travel many times from place to place, and from church to church, that he may the more easily obtain knowledge” (v. 7). This section also addresses the collecting of historical materials by stating that the historian and recorder’s duties include “writing, copying, selecting, and obtaining all things which shall be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations” (v. 8). Finally, Section 85 addresses historical content by specifying that the record is to include the Saints’ “manner of life, their faith, and works” (v. 2).

Another indispensable element of my schooling as Church Historian and Recorder in those early months was my association with Richard E. Turley Jr., who has worked in the Church History Department more than twenty-six years. From the beginning, he has been my mentor, my friend, my conscience, my campaign manager, and my greatest source of Church history knowledge. As the Assistant Church Historian and Recorder since 2008, he ranks in his contributions and value to the Church with the best who have ever occupied that office.

At the time I was absorbing these scriptural passages and Brother Turley was tutoring me, the Church History Department and the Family History Department were operating as a combined unit. Their merger had come about in 2000 and made sense on the surface but, in reality, produced a very unwieldy department that struggled against strong centrifugal forces. There came a day in early 2008 when I felt that, for the benefit of all concerned and the Lord’s work, we absolutely needed to seek a separation of the two departments. Our recommendation was advanced and quickly approved by the Twelve and First Presidency. We were informed that, in making the decision, President Thomas S. Monson simply observed, “Sometimes marriages work out and sometimes they don’t. The requested divorce is granted!”

The Journal of Mormon History
Having the Church History Department again become a separate entity simplified my life considerably. We had begun and could now accelerate an organizational study to determine the department’s central reason for being. This effort resulted in a purpose statement that has guided us ever since and will guide the department well into the future. The following statement represents the fruit of our labors:

The purpose of the Church History Department is to help God’s children make and keep sacred covenants by:

- Keeping and sharing a record of His Church and its people.
- Ensuring remembrance of God’s hand in the lives of His children.
- Witnessing to and defending the truths of the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Having established the department’s purpose, we were then able to determine our core work. I think we were blessed by the Lord to settle on the memorable little triplet: “Collect, Preserve, and Share.” Simple but comprehensive, this description of what the LDS Church History Department does has proved invaluable as a guide in organizing the department’s workforce and in developing strategic plans for the work of collecting, preserving, and sharing. As a result, the department has been transformed from a loosely knit organization of scholarly independent contractors—each primarily pursuing his or her own agenda and priorities—to a strategically focused, unified, and global enterprise. We’ve admittedly had our growing pains, but we are the better for them. The best proof of this is the admirable level of productivity the Church History Department has attained, and the influence that I feel it now exerts in a worldwide Church and in Church history circles.

In those beginning months of my service as Church Historian and Recorder, I also found it helpful to study the lives of the men who preceded me in the office. To realize that I had been asked to perform the same service as Oliver Cowdery, John Whitmer, Willard Richards, George A. Smith, Orson Pratt, Wilford Woodruff, Anthon H. Lund, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Dean L. Larsen, to name a few, has always been a sobering as well as a motivating thought. I have sometimes felt as if one or another of them was looking over my shoulder, making sure I didn’t depart from the course they helped chart. I suppose such a consciousness of history is just what ought to prevail in the LDS Church History Department.
Through my study, I developed a particular fondness and respect for Leonard J. Arrington whom I met only briefly on one occasion. Although he was supervised throughout his term of service by a General Authority managing director and, technically speaking, was named the Church historian in a more limited capacity as head of the History Division of the department, his contributions to the corpus of Church history and to the development of historians are remarkable. Brother Arrington’s challenges came, in my opinion, from not sufficiently recognizing that the Church History Department must do its work in a “correlated,” and not in an “academic,” environment. I mean by this that all that is done must be generally known to and approved by the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency and should complement and enrich historically the other materials and programs being advanced to help achieve the Church’s overall spiritual purposes.

This recognition convinced me early on that one of my most important duties as Church Historian and Recorder was to advocate the causes and initiatives of Church history upline. This process always involved, as a first step, informing and obtaining the guidance and approval of the two apostolic advisors assigned to Church history by the First Presidency—currently Elders Russell M. Nelson and Jeffrey R. Holland. These men and their predecessors have been indefatigable in keeping abreast of our work, reviewing manuscripts, and in offering wise and inspired counsel. They have provided me personally with an umbrella of apostolic security under which I could happily perform my prescribed duties. On the “weightier matters” (Matt. 23:23) of Church history, they have accompanied our department executives to meetings with the First Presidency—our designated point of contact for historical matters—and have had us make numerous informational presentations to the Quorum of the Twelve.

When, concerning historical issues, people occasionally inquire, “Do the Brethren really know?”, I have always felt confident in saying, “Yes, they really do know.” Requiring all significant decisions in such a vast organization to come to the attention of and be made by a body of fifteen men—and predominantly older men at that—probably wouldn’t work in any other setting, but it works beautifully in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Since Church history in its simplest form is stories, in the spirit of collecting, preserving, and sharing, I’d like at this point to relate to you my favorite First Presidency approval story. It concerns a public
restroom facility that was needed at the Mountain Meadows Massacre Monument site in September of 2007 to accommodate the visitors that were anticipated for the sesquicentennial commemoration of that event. Having procured plans and estimates for a proposed building and the related landscaping, we scheduled an appointment with the First Presidency to obtain their approval. On the appointed day, with the assistance of several picture boards, I explained to the members of the First Presidency the details of the facility and showed them the site plan. President Hinckley immediately asked me how much the entire project would cost. Knowing his reluctance to approve expenditures (he was forever telling us that the Church already owned more of its history than it could afford), I drew a deep breath and hesitantly said, “Eighty-five thousand dollars, President.” His reply—in a voice rising with incredulity—was, “An eighty-five-thousand-dollar privy?” There was a brief pause while I struggled for a rejoinder; and then, mercifully, President James E. Faust spontaneously exclaimed, “FDR would be proud of us, wouldn’t he, President?” The entire presidency burst out laughing, and President Hinckley said, “Go ahead and build your privy!”

The number of such appearances before the First Presidency to seek their approval seemed to accelerate about three years ago when a heaven-sent convergence of circumstances began to occur. In hindsight, I’m sure the work we had done to identify the purpose of the Church History Department, its core work of collecting, preserving, and sharing, and to organize our personnel accordingly, were critical preparatory steps. Our object was to make our organization and our work equal in quality to the magnificent new Church History Library into which we moved in June of 2009. That building itself—with its imposing size, superb layout and facilities, and very prominent, welcoming location—gave the department’s efforts a tremendous boost. Its day of dedication is a significant one in the history of Church history and was a joyous one for all who had worked to make it a reality.

Getting the department in good organizational shape allowed us to begin to take the next critical step—to strategically think about and plan our future. In doing so, we began to identify gaps and deficiencies in, among other things, our collections, our offerings, our processes, our use of technology, and our existing workforce. We recognized that we were especially lacking in our service to the international membership of the Church and in our efforts to tell the story of women. With these concerns and needs clearly in mind, we have
moved over time—here a little and there a little—to put the house of Church history in good order. A key to our progress, I feel, has been the hiring of a number of outstanding new employees, including over a dozen additional Ph.D. holders. Also vital has been the willingness of existing employees to change and adapt to new roles and ways of accomplishing our strategic objectives.

In stream of consciousness style, without regard to timing or priority, I’ll mention in summary fashion some of the most significant milestones in our progress:

- Restructuring the Joseph Smith Papers Project to include approximately twenty-two hardbound volumes, a world-class website, and a production schedule of two volumes per year.
- Establishing the Church Historian’s Press as a publishing imprint.
- Creating a five-year collection plan for Church history materials.
- Creating a technology roadmap that controls the development and use of technology and includes systems to harvest and preserve the Church’s vast domain of digital records.
- Putting the Church History Library catalog online and developing a plan to make its essential holdings available online over time.
- Establishing a decentralized model for collecting, preserving, and sharing Church history in the international Church. Currently 190 Church history volunteers are at work in the sixteen international areas.
- Strengthening the historic sites program and the transfer of Nauvoo and Martin’s Cove to the care and keeping of the Historic Sites Executive Committee, which the Church Historian and Recorder chairs.
- Planning and receiving approval for the restoration of Harmony, Pennsylvania, as a Church historic site. Construction begins in the fall of 2012.
- Creating a new twenty-year master plan for Church Historic Sites.
- Revitalizing the Church’s records management program.
- Creating a new master plan for the future of the LDS Church History Museum.
- Developing a more strategic and focused oral history plan.
• Publishing *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* and achieving reconciliation and excellent working relationship with all three Mountain Meadows groups.

• Creating a patriarchal blessing submission system and digitizing all 3.8 million blessings.

• Forming alliances with other Church departments, particularly with the Church Curriculum Department and Church Education System, so that a more complete story of the Church’s history can be told to all age groups.

There are many more, less obvious but equally essential changes that have occurred. In detailing these advancements, I want to stress that they are not mine, but the collective effort of many diligent and gifted servants in the kingdom. Like Ammon (Alma 26:11–12), I do not boast of myself, but of my God and of the work of my tremendous associates in the Church’s historical enterprise. I simply have had the singular blessing of being a happy victim of many favorable circumstances. As Brother Turley has sometimes observed, as we struggled to keep up, we have been blessed with a “crisis of success.”

Enoch, in describing the vastness of God’s creations, mentions that God’s “curtains are stretched out still” (Moses 7:30). In other words, notwithstanding His past accomplishments, God is still in production. So are the laborers in the Church history vineyard. I’m convinced that the future yet holds some wonderful accomplishments and surprises.

I’d like now to share a few personal experiences as Church Historian and Recorder that I especially treasure. The first is the spiritual impressions that both Brother Turley and I had to invite Reid L. Neilson to leave a promising career at Brigham Young University and consider a leadership role with Church history. His decision to come and to serve as the department’s managing director was a great blessing for me personally and for the future of the department. He is exceptional in every way and plays a significant role in the Church History Department’s current success.

Reid succeeded Steven L. Olsen as the department’s managing director. In stepping down, Steve had felt the Lord’s assurances that

---

he had made the difference that he was called to make. Much of
the Church History Department’s progress I have summarized rests
on Steve’s early work and vision. He has remained with the department
as a senior historic sites specialist and continues to add much value. I
regard Steve as a choice friend and a true Christian gentleman.

The pattern of General Authority assignments has always given
me a Seventy companion in the work of Church history. They have
been, most recently, Elder Marcus B. Nash, preceded by Elders Paul
K. Sybrowsky, Sheldon F. Child, L. Whitney Clayton, and Gary J.
Coleman. Each has made a unique contribution and been a treasured
associate.

The relationships I have been blessed to form with those in the
community of scholars and Church history devotees are also precious
to me. I will always remember the first embrace I received from Jan
Shipps. I knew then that, though undeserving, I had somehow been
accepted into the inner circles of Mormon history. To know and to be
known by those who have devoted their lives to the study and propa-
gation of Church history constitutes an honor and privilege for me. I
stand in awe of you—Mormon and non-Mormon, old and young, male
and female. I have loved hobnobbing and kibitzing with you at confer-
ences such as this one, attending your lectures, reading your articles
and books, and keeping a finger on the pulse of Church history that
you all help generate. I hope in some way to have helped bridge the
great divide between the apologists and antagonists in Mormon his-
tory and to have helped make welcome all comers to the Church his-
tory fold. Book of Mormon prophet/record-keepers kept both the
large and small plates—each with its particular historical emphasis
and content. Perhaps something similar is taking place today and
keepers of both records need to continue their work with “malice to-
ward none, with charity toward all.”2

My biggest personal regret is that I didn’t directly contribute to
the substance of Mormon history. Perhaps the necessity of keeping
up with my ecclesiastical duties and my handicap of holding a mere
“JD degree” (referred to by Reid L. Neilson as a “Junior Doctorate”)
will excuse me to some extent. I do take some satisfaction in having
helped give greater definition to the role of the Church Historian and

---

2Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865, Inau-
Recorder and to have again provided a more authoritative voice for Church history. I’m no Joseph Fielding Smith, to be sure, but I do believe we are creating a greater consciousness of Church history and its importance throughout the Church.

I’m also pleased that we have labored diligently to be completely open and honest about the Church’s past. After all, it is of truth that the Holy Ghost testifies. The internet almost mandates transparency as the order of the day, but it is also the right way to do our historical business.

When invited some months ago to suggest some potential successors for the office of Church Historian and Recorder, I put Elder Steven Erastus Snow at the top of my list. He is as capable as he is kind and has a style of leadership that will endear him to all who come to know and work with him. He loves Church history and uses it in his ministry. He is a gifted story teller. He is trusted by the Brethren, yet bold in his own thinking and actions. He will be a superb Church Historian and Recorder and has my full love and support.

Perhaps my most prized possession in stepping down as Church historian and recorder is the modest body of knowledge I have personally acquired about Church history. I have perhaps only put the pieces of the border together around the vast puzzle of Church history, but I have acquired at least a framework and will continue my quest for Church history knowledge in the peace of my retirement years. In doing so, I’ll always keep in mind Brother Turley’s wise warning: “Don’t study Church history too little!” In the future, I will watch and listen to all of you from a little distance, but I will always remain a student of your work and will always be one of your most ardent fans.

Finally, I will also always treasure the conviction I have gained that knowledge of Church history and the related act of remembering are essential to achieving our divine potential as God’s children. It was as Church historian and recorder that I first noticed that it was of record keeping that Alma spoke when he mentioned those “small and simple things” by which “great things [are] brought to pass” (Alma 37:6). The case that Alma goes on to make for Church history is most persuasive: (1) to enlarge “the memory of this people,” (2) to convince “many of the error of their ways,” and (3) to bring them “to a knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls.” To know that Church history and “remembering” are truly essential to salvation has made my long days and nights of hard work very worthwhile. That some are today stumbling in their faith because of historical
questions makes my heart ache and assures me that there is much work yet for Elder Snow and his associates in the Church History Department—and, indeed, for all of us—to do.

I’ve taken to heart President Thomas S. Monson’s counsel, and will leave with many treasured memories that will provide “June roses in the December of [my life].”¹ I suppose if I were asked what I’d like to be remembered for, I would answer using the words of the gifted and erudite Apostle Paul to the Corinthian intellectuals of his day:

> And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1–5)

I express to you my love, my appreciation, and my testimony that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer and that He and His beloved Father, our Father, appeared to Joseph Smith in the Sacred Grove in the spring of 1820 and restored the Church of Jesus Christ. That is the essence of Church history for me and the foundation of my life. In the future, I hope to read about and debate those essential facts less and live their profound implications more. That God may help me in this endeavor and you in those of your choosing, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

---
Autobiography offers us women’s voices describing their spiritual lives and ways of experiencing religious belief. Listening to these voices, and studying the language and images that form and convey women’s self-understandings in relationships to God and the

KATHERINE SARAH MASSOTH (katherine-massoth@uiowa.edu) is a Ph.D. candidate and Presidential Fellow in the Department of History, University of Iowa. This article is drawn from research for her master’s thesis. She is now completing her dissertation, “As Is the Custom of the Country: Gender, Cultural Practices, and Ethnic Identity in Arizona and New Mexico, 1846–1941.” ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: I express gratitude to Leslie Schwalm, Jeffrey Cox, and Douglas Baynton for their assistance, encouragement, and criticism during the research and writing of this article. Their feedback led to many revisions and made the article much stronger. I especially owe Leslie Schwalm many thanks for stepping out of her specialty to push me through this project and for allowing me to see my argument. Additionally, I appreciate the support of Malcolm Rohrbough and Linda K. Kerber. In each of their seminars, I was able to undertake this project and see it to fruition despite many setbacks. Omar Valerio-Jiménez is a generous mentor. And finally, I thank my colleagues who read this research in its earlier stages and the anonymous reviewers who provided thought-provoking questions. I have received much assistance but any shortcomings and mistakes are my own.
In 1859, Elizabeth Terry Heward, a member of the Mormon Church, sat down and wrote a sketch of her life, in which she included this message to her children: “It is said in my patriarchal blessing that my name will be had in honorable remembrance to all generations. Now, my dear children, this cannot be done unless you keep this record and also a record of your lives and hand it down to your children and command them to do the same.” One hundred and sixteen years later in 1975, LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball, advised teenage Church members: “Get a notebook, my young folks, a journal that will last through all time, and maybe the angels may quote from it for eternity.” He warned, “Remember, the Savior chastised those who failed to record important events.” Kimball and Heward reveal an emphasis in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) on recording personal history for future generations and the importance of following this direction as a commandment of the Lord. LDS members, both men and women, have recorded their testimonies, autobiographies, and diaries, often depositing originals or published copies in the LDS Church Family History Library for genealogical purposes or the LDS Church History Library for historical purposes.

**SCOPE OF THIS ARTICLE**

This article presents an analysis of autobiographies written by American-born women who converted to the LDS Church between 1829 and 1869. This does not necessarily mean the women wrote their autobiographies during this period. Instead, the women were within the first wave of LDS converts and migrated westward to

---


Utah during this time. This period is significant because, in 1830, the Book of Mormon was first published in Palmyra, New York, eventually leading to the “gathering of the Saints” in Zion (Utah), under one of Joseph Smith’s successors, Brigham Young. The Mormon Trail to Utah from Nauvoo, Illinois, lasted from 1846 to 1869, when the transcontinental railroad was completed. The authors themselves were born between 1784 and 1847 but converted and traveled to Utah within this period. The autobiographies were written as early as 1835 and as late as 1925. This range provides more evidence that LDS doctrine fostered a formulaic narrative because it is prevalent in autobiographies of women across generations but within the same religion.

Nineteenth-century LDS women employed their autobiographies to create their own identity in LDS culture. In these women’s autobiographies appear two persistent themes. First, many women used their autobiographies to reaffirm their commitment to the LDS Church through a formulaic narrative of their conversion experience and such spiritual experiences as healings and visions. Second, the narrative structure of these autobiographies reveals the manner in which women made a place for themselves in a patriarchal faith. Many autobiographies of nineteenth-century women converts played a dual role. They employed their autobiographies to demonstrate their conformity to Church teachings while also utilizing their pens to fashion a role for themselves as “missionaries” in a patriarchal church that otherwise limited their involvement in missionary activity during this period.

I argue that the autobiographers had two audiences in mind: LDS Church leaders and their own descendants. Both of these audi-
ences shaped the language and structure of how these women wrote their autobiographies. The autobiographies of Elizabeth Terry Hew-ard, Sarah DeArmond Pea Rich, Elizabeth Bullard Hyde, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy, Mary A. Noble, Leora Maryann Talmadge Campbell, Martha Pane Jones Thomas, Cordelia Calista Morley Cox, and Phoebe W. Carter Woodruff exemplify patterns found in 147 autobiographies that made up my larger study database.

In my analysis of these women’s autobiographies, I see an emerging literary form of women’s agency in the LDS Church during the nineteenth century. While LDS women used various avenues, such as the Relief Society and widely published memoirs, to celebrate or critique the Church, the autobiographies under analysis demonstrate an additional method in which late nineteenth-century LDS women used their voices to propagate their faith. The autobiographies discussed below are public literary expressions of how nineteenth-century LDS women self-consciously attempted to fit into the larger official LDS Church narratives.

These autobiographies are hardly the only writings of LDS women available for historians to mine. LDS women, beginning in the nineteenth century, produced the Woman’s Exponent, which eventually became the popular Relief Society Magazine, and the Young Woman’s Journal, which eventually joined the Improvement Era, its counterpart for the young men’s organization. Additionally, LDS women and former LDS women published memoirs to explain their experiences. In addition to these published sources, LDS women have created and continue to create diaries, journals, and correspondence for their children and future generations. In these records, LDS women openly express their concerns, discontent, and Church and family is-

rooted in his control over labor and property, his sexual access to his wife and dependent female laborers, [and] his control over other men’s sexual access to the women of his household.” I use her definition to understand Mormonism as a patriarchal faith because men had control over women’s access to religion and the Church by assigning gender-specific roles that placed the man in a dominant position over the woman. Kathleen M. Brown, Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 4–5.
For LDS women in the nineteenth century, the pen proved to be a rather hardy voice.

The autobiographies, published and unpublished, of LDS women are valuable resources, even with their limits. LDS women throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and into the twenty-first, have found various avenues to claim a space within the LDS Church. Literary means, such as newspapers, memoirs, and poems, are just one technique. The role of female editors like Kate B. Carter and editors of the *Woman’s Exponent* further demonstrate the important function assumed by women in recording, formulating, and proselytizing through ink on paper. These women demonstrate that various LDS women used their pens to write a space for themselves into larger official LDS narratives.

The ten women in this article typify common strands found in my thorough reading of more than a hundred autobiographical writ-

---

nings of American-born LDS women. I chose to focus on the autobiographies named above because they all contain narratives regarding conversion, healings, and visions. Not all of the ten contained all three of these experiences; however, each contained at least one. Moreover, these ten women illustrate the common theme of proselytizing to future generations that runs throughout all 147 autobiographies I initially analyzed.7

**RELIGIOUS WOMEN IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA**

The LDS women that I studied performed two actions in their writings—conforming and creation. To understand the noteworthy meaning behind this performance in their writings, it is crucial to understand the gender roles of religious women (both LDS and those of other faiths) in the United States in the nineteenth century and especially during the Second Great Awakening—the period of revival in which Mormonism was born. White women’s status was an enigma in nineteenth-century America because women appeared to have citizenship but lacked the basic rights of citizenship. In the eloquent words of historian Nancy Isenberg, “Equality remained a concept that somehow did not apply to women.”8 Moreover, the new American republic continued to practice the legal concept of coverture that Sir William Blackstone established in Eng-

---

7I stumbled upon these formulaic narratives while reading American LDS women’s autobiographies to understand their reasons for conversion. I did not initially intend to look for a formula. As I read, I noticed many women did not discuss specifically why they converted. Instead, I noticed similar voices in how women wrote about their conversion and similar themes across all the autobiographies. I could not answer my initial question about why women converted but realized that something larger was at work within these autobiographies. I noticed that the women were conforming to the Church’s encouragement to produce personal records, while also claiming a very prominent voice in the Church. The formulaic narrative revealed an emphasis on record-keeping but also exposed how women used this emphasis to claim their individual importance and power within the LDS Church. Overall, the autobiographies have more similarities than differences, even across generations. Furthermore, European converts also display a formulaic narrative.

land. Coverture meant that free women could not own property nor control their income. Instead, a woman was “covered” by her husband (or father, if unmarried) and denied legal and political rights. Under coverture, women were not citizens but subjects with limited privileges. For nineteenth-century women, submission was the most feminine virtue. U.S. society expected women to be deferential to male authority figures, especially fathers and husbands. According to historian Barbara Welter, “Men were the movers, the doers, the actors. Women were the passive, submissive responders.” The nineteenth-century woman was submissive to her husband’s and society’s demands. She was dependent on men for her worth in society. This same relationship between man and woman was part of early LDS doctrine.

When revivals struck New England, women’s roles were challenged somewhat. The Second Great Awakening, the period between 1790 and 1850, gave men and women individual responsibility for their salvation. The revivalists of the Second Great Awakening taught “self-respect” and that “individuals function as moral agents.” It was liberating to people habituated to deference because the revivals gave them the ability to practice their faith on their own terms. Women made up a majority of the converts during this period. Historian Nancy F. Cott argues that, while this conversion was surrendering to God’s will and similar to secular female submission, a woman’s conversion was actually “an act of initiation and assertion of strength.” During the Second Great Awakening, conversion created a direct relation to God through which women could bypass men’s religious au-

9Ibid., 7.


Nevertheless, conversion to evangelical religions confined women to gender-specific religious roles, sex-specific propriety, and a subordinate status within the community. Women found a purpose and power in the Second Great Awakening, even if they remained in a subordinate position. In her study of Protestant women’s writings from the nineteenth century, historian Janet Moore Lindman argues that women were able to create a self-identity because “one’s relationship to God was a direct one.” A woman’s husband or father did not mediate for her when she wanted to join a church. During the Second Great Awakening, women found a voice and a haven in religion due to the ideals of personal salvation and individualism. While they did not escape coverture or the “cult of true womanhood,” religious women used religion to form their identity and relationship with God.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was one of the many Second Great Awakening religions to promise salvation to Americans and to place women in a subordinate gender-specific role. By 1840, a decade after the founding of the LDS Church, it numbered more than twenty thousand followers. Many LDS women left retrospective autobiographies detailing how they sought a relationship with God and accepted their new faith. These autobiographies and the other written documents left by LDS women are valuable for more fully understanding the LDS Church. They provide the voice of

---

15 Ibid., 23.
19 Bushman and Bushman, Building the Kingdom, ix, 1.
women who were often in a subordinate role in the larger Church hierarchy. Scholar Laura L. Bush argues for the importance of LDS women’s voices: “Since the official founding in 1830 of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints . . . women have felt compelled on many occasions to explain and justify their religious beliefs.”

These writings provide insight into the lives of early LDS women and their perspectives on the Latter-day Saint Church. Nineteenth-century LDS women employed their autobiographies to create their own identity within Church doctrine.

The work of historian Mary Maples Dunn provides a useful framework for understanding how the nineteenth-century LDS Church achieved female subordination. In her study of Congregational women in colonial New England, Dunn argues that three factors led to the submission of Congregational women. First, the religious sect developed a distinctively female piety. Second, the religious leaders interpreted scripture to create female inferiority, leaving men in charge of forming doctrine and women’s roles. Finally, by creating the doctrine, men had the power to “socialize” women into the Church.

**Gender Roles for Nineteenth-Century Mormons**

The LDS Church created female piety through the concept of Mormon motherhood, which centered a woman’s divine role on her ability to produce and raise pious children. According to the Doctrine and Covenants 132:63 (July 12, 1843), “[women] are given unto him [man] to multiply and replenish the earth.”

This idea is elucidated in the pages of a 1970s lesson manual from the LDS woman’s organi-
ization, the Relief Society, that states: “If a woman looks upon her role of being a mother as the most important significant position she can hold in society, it can be an exciting adventure to be shared with her children by teaching, guiding, doing.” A woman’s place in LDS doctrine rested on her ability to bear and rear spiritually oriented offspring. Nineteenth-century LDS Church doctrine used the concepts of male priesthood and motherhood to separate and define the responsibilities of members based on gender, a differentiation that is still authoritatively and popularly articulated.

Laymen in the LDS Church received (and continue to receive) the priesthood, which is viewed as the authority of God (D&C 107;}

England in 1842. Unless otherwise noted, I cite this edition, including the date of the revelation’s dictation by Joseph Smith parenthetically in the text. See also Bushman and Bushman, Building the Kingdom, 2, 15–17.


March 28, 1835)\textsuperscript{26} and “power to act in the name of God.”\textsuperscript{27} The LDS Church created women’s subordinate status by asserting that only men could hold the priesthood and by establishing women’s primary role as mothers. Because women lacked the priesthood and the Church did not allow them to perform the ordinances (like baptism) necessary for salvation, women depend on priesthood holders and priesthood ordinances for salvation, access to the celestial kingdom, and their overall existence in the Church.\textsuperscript{28} The LDS doctrine of priesthood demonstrates that nineteenth-century Mormonism placed women in a subordinate position and made their salvation dependent, not on their own religiosity but on a patriarch—either a woman’s father or husband—provided she was faithful and obedient.

Much scholarly research has studied the subservient place that Mormons occupied during the nineteenth century. Scholar Susan Swetnam argues that, since women cannot hold the priesthood, LDS women “are assigned a clearly subservient role in their church.” This role means that LDS women, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, could not hold most major Church offices, they could not achieve the highest level of salvation unless they were sealed in marriage (marriage is also required for men’s salvation), and are taught

\textsuperscript{26}In the LDS Church, beginning at age twelve, boys who are considered worthy, are ordained to the lower (Aaronic) order of priesthood and progress through orderly stages to the upper (Melchizedek) priesthood, for which they become eligible at age eighteen. In the nineteenth century, it was not uncommon for adult male converts to be ordained as elders, the first level in the Melchizedek Priesthood either at or almost immediately after baptism. After about 1846, African American men were excluded from priesthood ordination; this policy was reversed in 1978. Because of this nearly universal ordination for adult Mormon men, they were broadly engaged in preaching, teaching, serving as missionaries and in administrative positions, healing by the laying on of hands, baptizing, and conferring the Holy Spirit. Women were not excluded from teaching and administrative positions in auxiliary organizations for children and women (especially as the twentieth century progressed), or from giving blessings of healing, especially to other women in the nineteenth century, although this activity came to be viewed as unorthodox in the twentieth century.

\textsuperscript{27}Bruce R. McConkie, \textit{Mormon Doctrine}, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 594–95.

that motherhood is their highest calling.29

The imperative of male leaders in defining women’s purpose and operationalizing their salvation found its way into the Relief Society, the influential LDS woman’s organization. Even if the Relief Society was a space for LDS women, patriarchy structured the goals. In April 1842, Joseph Smith told the Relief Society that women should “place confidence in their husbands, whom God has appointed for them to honor, and in those faithful men whom God has placed at the head of the Church.”30 Apostle and future Church president Lorenzo Snow reiterated Smith’s words on October 11, 1857, when he told LDS members that women “will honour and respect the power of the Priesthood that is upon their husbands” because “women have not the degree of light and knowledge that their husbands have; they have not the power over their passions that their husbands have.”31 Men socialized LDS women into the Church through the women’s role as wives. Women had important roles as mothers and held places in Church organizations, such as the Relief Society, but these roles were different from and unequal to the roles of men.32 The nineteenth-century LDS Church defined women through a subordinate relationship to their husbands because of his priesthood and her ability to have children.33 Her salvation was dependent on this relationship. She was not an autonomous being in the LDS Church. Regardless of assigned gender roles, scholars and historians have revealed the pow-

33Ann Braude asks why women have “devoted themselves to institutions [in this case, religions] that have reinforced their subjection?” Her question has interesting application to LDS women in the nineteenth century explored in this article. Braude’s answer is that “religions have glorified and affirmed women’s role as mothers even while participating in the frequent attacks on their performance in that role.” Mormonism, while limiting women’s influence in the church, does “glorify” motherhood, and many of the women I studied took advantage of this glorification to gain power. Braude in Keller, Braude, Beecher, and Fox-Genovese, “Forum,” 9–10.
erful roles that LDS women carved for themselves through Church organizations and the family. This research builds on the research of Rebecca Bartholomew, Martha Sonntag Bradley, Mary Brown Firmage Woodward, Jessie L. Embry, Maxine Hanks, Margaret Brady, Laura L. Bush, Janiece Johnson, Susan Hendricks Swetnam, Claudia Lauper Bushman, Lori G. Beaman, Jill Mulvay Derr, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher. These thoughtful scholars provide a strong background on the experience of LDS women across time and space. This article contributes to this body of important research by exposing one avenue in which nineteenth-century LDS women attempted to raise their voices in official Church history. While some scholars have studied the role of LDS women as writers, this research specifically seeks to understand how Church teachings on record-keeping influenced LDS women. Despite gendered limitations and roles, however, many nineteenth-century female LDS converts used their

---


35See for example, Godfrey, Godfrey, and Derr, eds., Women’s Voices; Bush, Faithful Transgressions in the American West; Jill Mulvay Derr, ed., Lives of the Saints: Writing Mormon Biography and Autobiography (Provo, Utah: Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2002); Jessie L.
autobiographies to formulate an important role for themselves within their assigned position. To understand how LDS women used their autobiographies, it is important to grasp the tradition of women’s autobiography in the United States, as well as the tradition of autobiographical writing and record-keeping in Mormonism.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL AGENDAS**

Autobiography is useful to the historian because it provides access to the self-perception of the writer. Autobiographies can shed light on how people perceived themselves, others, and events, providing the historian with an understanding of different viewpoints from within one community. Personal writings, like autobiographies, can also allow historians access to the experiences of minorities. Literary scholar Sidonie Smith defines autobiography as “the process and the product of assigning meaning to a series of experiences, after they have taken place, by means of emphasis, juxtaposition, commentary, [and] omission.” By acknowledging that autobiographies are human constructions meant to convey a certain story to the audience, historians can use autobiographies to understand how people wanted others to remember their life. Men and women over the centuries have used autobiography to explain their life from their own point of view and to assign meaning to their lives. Through the act of writing, autobiographers are able to create their own understanding and commentary of an event for the public.

Many spiritual autobiographers shaped their life writings to convey a certain message for their Church. Authors of spiritual autobiographies have used the narrative form to confirm and express


their faith to the religious community. Daniel B. Shea’s study of Puritan and Quaker autobiographies from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates how religion influenced how believers wrote their autobiographies. Shea, a literary scholar, found that Puritan or Quaker writers were primarily concerned with salvation. He determined that the act of writing an autobiography was to testify that one’s experience conformed to the community’s standards. The use of autobiographies to demonstrate obedience to religious rules is important for understanding LDS women’s autobiographies, as my research reveals how the intended audience shaped a person’s interpretation of her life.

Shea’s study provides an interesting and crucial point of comparison. Many early LDS converts were descendants of Puritans and Quakers. Most likely, the influence of these religions shaped early LDS women’s understanding of their new spirituality and act of writing an autobiography with Church officials and, closer to their hearts, their descendants. These two audiences shaped their testimonies in profound ways.

Religious white women throughout the United States used their autobiographies to claim an identity while adhering to community ideals of female propriety. Scholar Carol Edkins found that, in the spiritual autobiographies of eighteenth-century Quaker and Puritan women, the women adhered to a formula of describing their religious experiences. By following this formula, the women created a “symbolic bonding with the group” that brought them into a new role—Church member. The importance of bonding and becoming a Church member demonstrates that these women were seeking an identity for themselves. Similarly, literary scholar Estelle C. Jelinek found that, in the early nineteenth century, women’s autobiographies demonstrated the need to “win the acceptance and respect of their

---

38Ibid., 91.
40Ibid., 52.
families and friends.” Later in the nineteenth century, Jelinek argues that even suffragists used their autobiographies to build an identity that followed demands for female propriety and to prove their femininity. This important scholarship on autobiography in the United States demonstrates that writers were not simply describing their lives. Instead, some writers found liberation and identity through writing and used their writing to conform to ideals set by society or religions. Nineteenth-century LDS women also used their life stories to gain power and prove their worthiness to the Mormon community. LDS women shaped their autobiographies to demonstrate their faith and to highlight the importance of their role as women in the Church.

Within Mormonism, record-keeping has been an important practice since the religion’s foundation on April 6, 1830. Joseph Smith first established the importance of record-keeping in Mormonism by recording at least four versions of his theophanic “First Vision” (ca. 1820), between 1832 and 1842, now part of the LDS canon. The Doctrine and Covenants, also canonized, is comprised almost exclusively of his revelations, visions, and letters of inspired counsel. On April 6, 1830, the day of the Church’s organizational meeting, Joseph Smith dictated a revelation beginning: “Behold, there shall be a record kept among you; and in it thou shalt be called a seer, a translator, a prophet, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (D&C 21:1).

In its official organization, the LDS Church created formal positions to enforce the Church’s record-keeping. Male clerks were charged with maintaining the Church’s history. However, the LDS Church routinely and strongly encouraged members to maintain personal records and submit them to the Church archives. Revelations on record-keeping in the Doctrine and Covenants stressed the importance

---


42Ibid., 98; this work provides a heavily researched introduction to women’s autobiography beginning in 100 A.D. through the mid-twentieth century. She especially focuses on American women’s autobiography and details changes in how women wrote.

43All of the women in this study were white.

44Bush, *Faithful Transgressions in the American West*, 3, analyzes the formulaic elements in the teenage Joseph Smith’s theophany that provided a model for the autobiographies of other Mormons.
of this activity. Doctrine and Covenants 69:8 (November 1831) instructs members about the importance of “preaching and expounding, writing, copying, selecting, and obtaining all things which shall be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations.” Almost a decade later, Doctrine and Covenants 127:7 (September 1, 1842), linked documentation directly to the process of salvation: “That in all your recordings it may be recorded in heaven; whatsoever you bind on earth, may be bound in heaven; whatsoever you loose on earth, may be loosed in heaven.”

According to this doctrine, earthly events were important for shaping salvation in the afterlife. Doctrine and Covenants 127:9 (September 1, 1842) states the necessity of archiving records: “Let all records be had in order, that they may be put in the archives of my holy temple, to be held in remembrance from generation to generation.” The Doctrine and Covenants repeatedly stresses the importance and necessity of record-keeping. Historian David J. Whittaker states that these pronouncements by Joseph Smith in the Doctrine and Covenants led members to believe that “that they would have the Spirit of the Lord with them proportional to their diligence in record-keeping.”

The above-mentioned revelations demonstrate the centrality of record-keeping in the LDS Church. To understand the emphasis on record-keeping, it is necessary to explain the importance of genealogy in the LDS concept of heaven. Doctrine and Covenants 127:7 (1842) reveals the importance that record-keeping played in members’ ability to obtain salvation. According to this doctrine, whatever events members did not document on earth were subsequently not noted in heaven. Additionally, records dating essential ordinances such as baptism were essential for salvation and exaltation in the afterlife. Ge-nealogical records became important to trace ancestors, to connect family members, and to perform proxy ordinances (such as baptism) that would allow the deceased to accept the gospel. LDS members

---

45For further discussion on the relationship between documentation and salvation, see Bushman and Bushman, Building the Kingdom, 85–86; McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 308–9, 621–22.


47Bushman and Bushman, Building the Kingdom, 19–20.
wanted to be bound to all their family members and conduct baptisms for the dead to secure this goal from the Nauvoo period on.\textsuperscript{48} According to historians Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, “Mormons believe family ties, present, past, and future, to be eternal.”\textsuperscript{49} The Doctrine and Covenants includes revelations expounding the importance of record-keeping, thus demonstrating that record-keeping was a sign of a worthy Mormon.

While LDS Church elders charged men with maintaining official Church records, LDS women, beginning in the nineteenth century, played a key role in facilitating Church and family record-keeping. In fact, within the patriarchal organization of the LDS Church, keeping records and writing autobiographies was understood as an ecclesiastically authorized “venue” for both men and women.\textsuperscript{50} According to Whittaker, “An early concern for keeping personal records such as a daily journal [was] also seen as both a duty and a privilege. . . . The common thread was the importance of documenting each person’s contributions to the establishing of a new dispensation.”\textsuperscript{51} Often women turned to the Relief Society to focus their record-keeping efforts. In the twentieth century, the Relief Society’s manuals contained specific instructions for writing life histories.\textsuperscript{52} Combined with their roles as mothers, record-keeping, especially family records, became a venue for women’s work. The LDS Church, while not officially or exclusively assigning women to this work, expected them to become recorders and guardians of their family’s history.

With so much emphasis placed on record-keeping in LDS teachings, it is not surprising that Mormon men and women have submitted autobiographies, diaries, and journals to the LDS History Library and the Church History Library. Scholars in many fields have studied

\textsuperscript{48}\textsuperscript{Ibid., 85–86; see also McConkie, \textit{Mormon Doctrine}, 308–9, 621–22.}

\textsuperscript{49}\textsuperscript{Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, \textit{The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints}, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 303. In 1894, the LDS Church established a genealogical society to facilitate research.}

\textsuperscript{50}\textsuperscript{Bush, \textit{Faithful Transgressions in the American West}, 4.}

\textsuperscript{51}\textsuperscript{Whittaker, “Biography and Memory in Mormon Culture,” 100–101.}

\textsuperscript{52}\textsuperscript{Swetnam, \textit{Lives of the Saints in Southeast Idaho}, 2.}
these texts to understand different facets of Mormonism. In his study of LDS autobiography, literary scholar Steven P. Sondrup found that the LDS members wrote not only to “seek a spiritual identity” but to expand on their religious insights and experiences. LDS autobiographers knew they were writing for the benefit of others, including succeeding generations.\(^{53}\) Literary scholar Neal E. Lambert expands on this idea by claiming that LDS autobiographers used their writings to explain themselves to both “themselves and to the world.” He argues that the act of writing autobiography was “an attempt to not only preserve but to understand and shape” one’s identity.\(^{54}\)

In her analysis of twentieth-century LDS women’s autobiographies in the American West, Laura L. Bush combines the arguments of Sondrup and Lambert. She identifies three purposes for three different audiences: (1) “in order to promote their faith” to new members or nonmembers, (2) to “document a personal history that will testify to the truth of the autobiographer’s experience” to other members, and (3) to “talk back to critics through the story of their lives.”\(^{55}\) My study of LDS women’s autobiographies takes Bush’s assessment back into the nineteenth century and argues that LDS women wrote to explain their faith to future generations in hopes of securing their descendants’ faith. Moreover, the autobiographies allowed LDS members to comprehend their own identity within the religious community while explaining their faith to Church elders.

Nineteenth-century LDS women used their autobiographies to formulate an important role for themselves within their assigned position. They used their pens to reaffirm their faith and commitment to the doctrine by documenting their conversion experience and the healings and visions they experienced. The women were fulfilling the official instructions to maintain records and were also making their experiences part of the Church through their writing. The women demonstrated their piety while also highlighting the importance of their role as women in Mormonism. As stated above, Elizabeth Terry


Heward began her autobiography by quoting the promise of her patriarchal blessing that her “name will be had in honorable remembrance,” an achievement which she saw as occurring through the recording of her life.56 Just as women understood the importance of male priesthood, women in the nineteenth-century LDS Church understood the importance of documenting their life for salvation.

I will next explore the relationship between male missionaries and women autobiographers by exposing the women’s unique use of their autobiographies to claim a position as missionaries. By writing for future generations, LDS women were attempting to insert themselves into the missionary activity of conversion and connect generations of family members in ways that would assure their salvation. Next, I discuss the role of conversion in the LDS women’s autobiographers, followed by an analysis of the women’s documentation of healings and visions. In their documentation of their conversion, healings, and visions, the LDS women were not solely writing for descendants but also for Church officials. The women were attempting to insert their story into the official Church narrative.

FOR THEIR CHILDREN: FORMULATING A NARRATIVE

A thorough reading of nineteenth-century female autobiographies reveals a formulaic structure found in most women’s autobiographies. Through the documentation of their conversion experience, healings, and visions, these women used their autobiographies to present their lives as living out the gospel and as testaments to its truth. For some LDS women, conversion was not simply a willingness to accept Mormon baptism but an ongoing process of religious affirmation. Furthermore, these women were upholding the LDS role of women as teachers of faith. As noted above, a woman’s primary role, according to LDS understandings, was to bear, rear, and guide her children to become faithful and obedient members of the Church. The formulaic nature of nineteenth-century LDS women’s autobiographies presents the writing as a testimony of faith for future generations that allowed the women to become missionaries through their pens.

While late-nineteenth-century LDS men were able to share the gospel through tract distribution and missions, many nineteenth-century LDS women used their writings to present the truths of the gos-

56Heward, “A Sketch of the Life of Elizabeth Terry Heward,” 76.
pel to future generations. Men physically became missionaries who walked miles, preached sermons, and engaged in individual scripturally based debates to convert souls. Women became figurative missionaries with the aim of securing their descendants’ salvation and connecting generations of family members in the “household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). While they did not walk miles with tracts in their hands, they did survive repeated moves (including all or portions of the distance from New York, to Ohio, to Missouri, to Illinois, and the overland trek to Utah and beyond). Through their documentation of these and other religious experiences, they were able to proselytize future readers of their autobiography, whether family members, Church officials, or chance readers. The writing of autobiography, just like public testimonies and preaching the gospel in person and letters, was one method by which women inserted themselves in Church practices and claimed their status as disciples.57

During the twentieth century, much of the LDS emphasis on personal histories focused on women. The LDS Church encouraged women to take up the duty of writing, organizing, and saving the Church’s history. In 1932, the Daughters of Utah Pioneers began publishing the multi-volume series of monthly lessons compiled as Our Pioneer Heritage, which contained biographies, autobiographies, and diaries of early Mormon pioneers. In every volume’s Foreword, Kate B. Carter, the editor, stressed the role women played in maintaining the records. Carter wrote, “We Daughters become the custodians of our family traditions. We are their historians, their biographers, their authors.”58 Furthermore, in 1979, the Relief Society, the primary LDS woman’s organization, offered a lesson on recording family histories named “A Goodly Heritage” that emphasized “studying and honor-

57For more on LDS women’s preaching, see Johnson, “Give Up All and Follow Your Lord,” BYU Studies, 77–107; and Janiece Johnson, “Give It All Up and Follow Your Lord”: Mormon Female Religiosity, 1831–1843 (Orem, Utah: Millennial Press, 2009).

58Carter, Our Pioneer Heritage, 8v. Other significant publications by Daughters of Utah Pioneers, all of which contain biographical and autobiographical sketches, include Heart Throbs of the West, 12 vols. (1939–51); Treasures of Pioneer History, 6 vols. (1952–57); An Enduring Legacy, compiled by Daughters of Utah Pioneers Lesson Committee, 12 vols. (1978–89); Chronicles of Courage, 8 vols. (1990–97); and Pioneer Pathways, 3 vols. (1998–2000). As this impressive bibliography shows, Our Pioneer Heritage contributed
ing” LDS ancestors through the documentation of their lives. The lesson stressed how family history serves as a sharing of testimonies: “In a world that ignores or misunderstands spiritual matters, our families and friends need to hear our testimonies. Children especially need to hear and be guided by the firm testimonies of their parents.”

More recently, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich reiterated the importance of women as record-keepers in a lecture about her experience in the LDS Church History Library and the importance of Doctrine and Covenants 128:8 for Mormon women’s history. Ulrich stated, “There is a lesson here, I think, for Latter-day Saint women. To honor Elijah [the biblical prophet] we must turn our hearts to our mothers as well as our fathers. To give Clio [the muse of history] a history, we must begin to keep our own.”

Throughout its existence, the LDS Church has urged every member to keep personal records, but it has also stressed the importance of women fulfilling this role. I speculate that it similarly encouraged nineteenth-century women to fulfill this function.

The Church’s emphasis on women’s record-keeping fostered a formulaic structure in women’s autobiographies. Some scholars have argued that the formulaic nature of twentieth-century LDS women’s written or oral narratives provided women with personal power in a male-dominated faith. Literary scholar Margaret K. Brady found a formulaic structure in twentieth-century narratives of pregnant LDS women. According to Brady, each woman’s narrative “involved either a dream or a visionary experience in which a child appears to a woman who had previously decided that her family was complete, and begs to come to Earth. The experience is so convincing that the

twenty volumes to this on-going project. Carter was listed as the compiler and editor of the first four series, and Daughters of Utah Pioneer Lesson Committee have produced those up to the present, with a themed volume each year, each of which also includes biographical/autobiographical articles.


60Ibid., 45.


62I have not been able to obtain records for nineteenth-century Church documents on recording personal histories except in the Doctrine and Covenants.
woman, in almost every case, becomes pregnant at the earliest possible moment.” Brady argues that these visions allowed LDS women to come to terms “with the varied personal, feminine, and ecclesiastical goals of reproduction” in the patriarchal church. Furthermore, scholar Susan H. Swetnam found a “formulaic surface” in LDS ancestor biographies written by Idaho women during the twentieth century. According to Swetnam, “virtually all LDS writers claimed as a thesis that grandma or grandpa was an ideal Mormon; all included predictable stories detailing hard work, conventional virtue, and devotion to church and family.” She concluded that the LDS women’s account of their female ancestors “suggests that a significant proportion of Mormon women have taken over the church’s official biographical tradition, modifying it to help relieve the pressure that the church itself puts on them.” Brady and Swetnam demonstrate that LDS women during the twentieth century manipulated the narratives of their women ancestors and their own narratives to deal with the patriarchal power of the LDS Church.

Many of the autobiographies of nineteenth-century LDS women also reveal a formulaic structure that allowed the autobiography to become a testimony of faith for future generations rather than a life history. I argue that nineteenth-century LDS women may have used their writings to cope with assigned gender roles and to adopt the missionary role. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the LDS Church did not permit most LDS women to become missionaries unless they accompanied their husbands. It was not until 1898 that the LDS Church called women as official missionaries, “set apart” to that function in a fashion parallel to the men and fitting into the existing mission structure. Prior to 1898, the Church saw proselytizing as an exclusively male responsibility; and the significant announcement at October 2012 general conference that lowered the age at which young men could serve to eighteen (formerly nineteen)

64Swetnam, “Turning to the Mothers,” 2, 5.
65In 1898, LDS mission president Joseph McMurrin created the first missionary certification program for women because they were generally more successful in holding gospel conversations than their male counterparts. Maxine Hanks, “Sister Missionaries and Authority,” in Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism, edited by Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 316.
and at which young women could serve as nineteen (formerly twenty-one) stressed in each iteration of the announcement that missionary service was a “duty” for young men but not for young women, although their service was “welcome.”

I posit that some young LDS women at the end of the nineteenth-century were struggling with the fact that they could not become missionaries. In a pseudonymous article published in the 1890 Young Woman’s Journal, “Viola” warned “my dear girls”: “Don’t jump at the conclusion that we are going to be sent to proclaim the gospel to the nations of the earth, Such is not your mission. Are not the souls of those born in Zion, as precious to the Lord’s sight, as those who are brought from afar?” Viola thus underscored the gender roles within Mormonism and their implications for female behavior. A woman’s occupation was to teach the faith to the children already in the Church, while a man’s mission was to convert souls all over the world. By focusing on the children, according to Viola, the women would be fulfilling their “mission” and, by extension, honoring the priesthood. Through their autobiographies, many women proselytized to their children, creating a space for themselves within LDS doctrine.

During the nineteenth century, as is true today, all men in good standing received the priesthood and the Church assigned them the duty to proselytize. Doctrine and Covenants 68:8 (November 1831) called members: “Go ye into all the world, preach the gospel to every creature, acting in the authority [the priesthood] which I have give you.” Although this revelation does not specify gender, nineteenth-century women understood that they could not officially take up this charge; instead, they found unofficial ways to proselytize through public speaking engagements, letters, and their written records.

In contrast is the experience of Thomas D. Evans, one LDS con-

---


vert to take up this call. After converting at the age of sixteen, Evans was “soon ordained a Priest and took hold of the ministry.” He converted his mother and stepfather, and traveled among his “friends, neighbors and relatives preaching the Gospel of life and salvation.”

Describing his missionary experience, Evans wrote: “I traveled on foot without purse or scrip for six years, preaching the glad tidings that the Prophet Joseph Smith had seen an angel; that through him the Gospel of Christ had been restored, the Church of Jesus Christ organized, and missionaries sent out to warn the nations and preach to them the gospel of life and salvation.” Through his missionary efforts, Evans had the “satisfaction” of baptizing many into the Mormon Church. Evans used his autobiography to document the important role he played as a missionary and why he felt fulfilled doing this task. As a missionary, Evans was an active participant in the Church. His writing was not necessary to document his role because he helped increase the number of followers. Through the converts he gained and his role as a missionary, Evans felt he represented the principles of his faith. His autobiography did not need to spell out the principles of faith.

69I conducted a brief, not extensive, comparison of nineteenth-century LDS men’s and women’s autobiographies. For my analysis of men’s autobiographies, I concentrated on all the nineteenth-century male autobiographies, even non-American-born, in all twenty volumes of Kate B. Carter’s Our Pioneer Heritage. In most of the men’s autobiographies, the men detail when they converted and their missionary or Church leadership experience. These records are brief and factual, not “preachy” in tone. While Kate B. Carter heavily edited these volumes, the fact that the men’s autobiographies contain different information than women’s and follow a different structure demonstrates the gendered roles and use of autobiography. When and if Carter edited the men’s autobiographies, it is apparent she wanted the men’s lives to represent the missionary efforts and goals. Instead, when and if she edited women’s autobiographies, Carter wanted the women’s lives to represent a morality tale to descendants and to document the role of LDS women in the Church. Kate B. Carter’s editing procedures, a topic for further research, provides more evidence of the role of women in shaping the LDS Church’s historical narrative.


71Ibid., 14:273.
Most nineteenth-century LDS women did not have the ability to document officially the number of converts they brought into the fold. Instead, the women were able to proselytize their children and other readers through their autobiographies. Many LDS women stated explicitly in their autobiographies that their descendants should use their autobiography as written evidence of the Church and the gospel’s veracity. Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, like most LDS women, could not travel as a missionary during the second half of the nineteenth century. While Evans was able to travel officially and convert people through his actions, Rich proselytized through her autobiography. By ending her autobiography with a statement to her children, Rich presented her life as a lesson with a moral. Rich documented her testimony of the gospel in order that her children (and presumably other readers) would come to believe in the same gospel. Rich wrote, on July 4, 1885, “I know, dear children, that the principles of Mormonism, as it is called, are true. I know that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God. How do I know it you may ask? I know it by hearing him prophesy what was coming, and have lived to see the things prophesied about come to pass. I have been a true believer in the principles taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith and all the leading men of this church.”

Rich thus used the conclusion of her autobiography to teach her children and to declare why she had followed the gospel. Through her writing, Rich demonstrated how she actively lived the gospel and how her children could do the same. Her autobiography became like the tracts that LDS missionaries distributed wherever they traveled.

Furthermore, nineteenth-century LDS women used their autobiographies to demonstrate their lasting belief in the religion. Many of the women’s autobiographical writings contain statements in which the author explicitly states that, regardless of harassment or doubts regarding the veracity of the Church, they continued to trust their decision to convert. Elizabeth Bullard Hyde wrote, “I have never regretted the sacrifice, if it can be called a sacrifice, of leaving friendly neighbors and home.” While this is a simplistic statement, one can draw some conclusions when also looking at her conversion experience. This sentence follows immediately after she described finding

the LDS Church. After reading the Book of Mormon, Hyde maintained, “Those words were accompanied with the Spirit of God to such a degree that my heart rejoiced, and I knew for myself that this was indeed the work of God. I was then ready for baptism.” To then assert in the following sentence that the journey to Utah was not a sacrifice in comparison to following the gospel affirms to the reader (and the Church) her belief in the Book of Mormon.

Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner provided a similar comment. Toward the end of her autobiography, she asserts: “I have been driven about and told I would be shot and had a gun pointed at me, but I stayed with the Church until it was driven from Nauvoo. The words of the Prophet that had been revealed to him always have been with me from the beginning to the end of the gospel. Every principle that has been given in the Church by the Prophet is true. I know whereon I stand, I know what I believe, I know what I know and I know what I testify to you is the living truth.” Lightner presented a weighty statement in this declaration. She made it evident that there was absolutely no doubt in her choice to convert. Lightner emphasized her belief and devotion to the gospel, and gave proof that it was unwavering even though she had faced many opportunities when abandonment may have been easier. Elizabeth Hyde and Mary Rollins Lightner both included brief statements in their autobiographies that assert to their children (and to the Church at large) that they never doubted their faith. The autobiographies of nineteenth-century LDS women almost always include statements similar to Hyde’s and Lightner’s. The women used their written documents to demonstrate and explicitly detail to their descendants their unwavering faith.

Furthermore, the language in women’s autobiographies is motherly and didactic. LDS women often ended their biographies by explicitly addressing their children, while many of the men’s mission-


74 Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, “The Life and Testimony of Mary Elizabeth Lightner,” April 14, 1905, typescript, 1–2, MSS 970, L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts Division, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter Perry Special Collections). See also Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, “Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner,” Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine 17 (July 1926): 193-205, 250–60.
ary autobiographies only stated where they traveled and how many converts they baptized. Both Rich and Evans declare what the Prophet Joseph Smith did and why they believed in the gospel. However, the autobiographies of male missionaries are often concise and solely describe missionary experiences. Since LDS men were active in the Church through the priesthood, they needed only to document the converts that they brought into the fold. For example, Einar Eiriksson, a missionary from Iceland, detailed in his autobiography, “During the six years I presided over the branch of Iceland I baptized 16 and blessed 9 children.” Furthermore, Ole Harmon Olsen, a missionary from Norway, did not detail his personal experiences with the faith but instead stated, “I went teaching every Sunday and I tracted a great deal as there were numerous families to visit.”

In their autobiographies, men documented their own conversions and missionary experiences. As missionaries, nineteenth-century LDS men were able to spread the gospel and live the faith through their actions.

LDS women maintained their role as mothers and educators of the faith by focusing their autobiographies as lessons for future generations. Many of the women’s autobiographies demonstrate the same proselytizing that Rich presented in her autobiography. These women used their writing to present themselves as educating their children about the faith. While they could not distribute tracts, the women were able to use their autobiographies. In doing so, they implicitly challenged the Church’s gender roles, demonstrated that they lived the faith, and were able to assist in spreading the gospel. At the beginning of her autobiography, Nancy Naomi Alexander Tracy stated, “I merely detail the outlines of my travels and persecutions for the Gospel’s sake (in connection with my husband until the time of his death) for the benefit of my posterity after me.” By writing that she “merely” wanted to write the details for her children, Tracy explained the importance of writing her autobiography to share her personal experiences of persecution related to the Mormon gospel. Tracy used

---


her hardships in practicing the Mormon gospel to teach her children about its truths, which she noted was connected to her husband’s life. At the end of her autobiography, Tracy inserted a more profound message: “It seems as though anyone that reads the history of the Mormon Church from the beginning and looks for once at the progress of this church in the midst of opposition and persecution, yet it has and will roll steadily on. I say this is enough to convince anyone that God is at the helm and if the Saints will keep his laws, they will be instruments to bear off his kingdom.”78 Tracy thus demonstrated that she understood the importance of teaching the gospel to her children and others. More importantly, the language she used is similar to missionary language of salvation. Through their autobiographies, LDS women proselytized to their children, creating a space for themselves within the Church doctrine.

Furthermore, LDS women explicitly revealed that their intentions were to teach their children and audience through their writings and to improve their descendants’ spirituality. For example, Elizabeth Terry Heward began her testimony, like the autobiographies of many LDS women, by stating her goal: “For the benefit of my children, I undertake to write a history of my life.” Heward then depicted how her life showed her obedience to Church teachings and how her faith benefited her life. In the last pages, she summarized what her life meant and instructed her children to keep her record and to record their own lives: “You can keep the genealogy of your fathers as long as the earth shall stand for this is in accordance to your blessing as children of Abraham. As long as you keep the commandments of the Lord your posterity shall not be cut off from the earth.”79

Shea found similar didactic writings in the spiritual autobiographies of Puritans and Quakers. The didactic writings, Shea claims, demonstrate the intended use of the autobiography, especially as autobiographers inserted messages like, “‘To my dear and loving children.’”80 By ending with this injunction, Heward was able to demonstrate to her children the importance of maintaining the faith but also the importance of documenting their lives as part of this faith. Heward, along with Rich, Hyde, Lightner, Tracy, and many other LDS

78Ibid.
79Heward, “A Sketch of the Life of Elizabeth Terry Heward,” 66.
women, did not write only autobiographies. They wrote guides for future generations and instructions about the importance of the gospel. Through this act of proselytizing to their descendants, nineteenth-century LDS women inserted themselves into the plan of salvation and practiced the priesthood role of uniting families to their ancestors and descendants.

**Documenting the Conversion Experience**

Throughout the Second Great Awakening, the meaning attached to religious conversion changed. During revivals, religious leaders no longer defined conversion in Puritan terms, which emphasized the workings of the Holy Ghost upon the person. Instead, religious conversion became defined in individualistic terms. Religious men and women held that any person could choose to be holy rather than sinful. Conversion became a personal experience that anyone could achieve.81 My sample of early female LDS converts’ writings shows that the Second Great Awakening ideology of conversion was working among them. Many of them declared that they had discovered on their own that the gospel of Joseph Smith was the truth. Six of them in particular, Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, Elizabeth Bullard Hyde, Mary A. Noble, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Leora Maryann Talmadge Campbell, and Elizabeth Terry Heward, documented that they each came privately to understand the Book of Mormon as scripture and that each made the decision to be baptized on her own.

Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich was born on September 23, 1814, in St. Clair County, Illinois. In the first paragraphs of her autobiography, Rich wrote that, in her youth, her family was “very much divided in their religion.” While living with her uncle in West Tennessee, Rich attended the Presbyterian meetinghouse with her aunt and cousins; and at night, she listened to the preaching of her Baptist uncle. Rich and her family returned to Illinois where her family became members of the Reformed Methodist Church. In the summer of 1835, at age twenty-one, Rich encountered another faith when her father requested that two LDS elders visit the family home: “The two elders came and held a meeting and preached on the first principles of the gospel, and related to the people about their being a prophet in their church,

and told us about the Book of Mormon, and about an angel appearing to the prophet and others; all of which was new doctrine to the people.”

When the elders came again to her father’s house for dinner, Rich was anxious to read the Book of Mormon. She asked the elders if she could have a copy. One elder “gladly handed” the book to her. That very evening, Rich “asked the company to excuse me for the evening and most of the night I spent in reading that book. I truly was greatly astonished at its contents that it left an impression upon my mind not to be forgotten. For in fact the book appeared to be open before my eyes for weeks but the next morning those men bid us good-bye . . . but still the things they told us left a deep impression on our minds, not easy to be forgotten.”

By separating herself from the family in her description of encountering the Book of Mormon, Rich presented a narrative in which she learned about Mormonism through the elders’ instruction to the whole family, but she did not experience conversion until she was alone. Rich made her conversion an autonomous and personal experience.

Within a few days of a second visit from an elder, Rich was convinced that the Book of Mormon was the true gospel of God. On December 15, 1835, she was baptized. About her conversion, she wrote, “I had made it a business of prayer to my Father in Heaven to show me is this the work of God, and He did so. I was truly convinced that it was the true gospel.” Even though her father provided the occasion for her encounter with Mormonism, in her writing Rich emphasized that her conversion experience was a personal moment.

Elizabeth Bullard Hyde was born into the Congregational Church in Holliston, Massachusetts, on October 2, 1813. She was baptized into the same church in 1830 at seventeen. Hyde’s mother taught her and her siblings to fear God and to live “upright and honorable lives.” Hyde wrote that from an early age she was attracted to religion. She often studied and spent time alone in her room, praying that God would direct her “how to obtain a change of heart,” which

---

83 Ibid.
84 Rich did not state whether her family members were also baptized on that same day. However, she noted later that her “father’s family joined the Church” and also that her sister converted. Ibid.
her minister said was necessary for salvation. In 1833, Hyde’s relatives Brigham Young and Joseph Young introduced her to Mormonism. Upon their visit to the family’s home, she began to explore Mormonism:

I had faith in God that if I would humble myself before Him in an acceptable manner, He would manifest unto me the truth. I accordingly spent many hours each day in my chamber searching the Scriptures, and asking in earnest prayers that if this was the work of God, I might know it myself. I had thus been employed when I arose from my knees and opened my Bible to the 15th Psalm, 5th verse, which reads, “Gather my saints together unto me, those have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.” Those words were accompanied with the Spirit of God to such a degree that my heart rejoiced, and I knew for myself that this was indeed the work of God. I was then ready for baptism.

Hyde and her mother were baptized on June 30, 1838. In Hyde’s description of her private and earnest search for the truth regarding Mormonism, she revealed the importance of independent action. By spending time alone studying the scriptures and asking God for help, Hyde made it clear to her readers that she chose to convert. Even though her relatives were Mormon leaders Brigham Young (future Church president) and Joseph Young (future president of the Seventies), Hyde made it evident that she did not accept Mormonism because of their influence. Rather, she sought the truth on her own.

Mary A. Noble became acquainted with the Book of Mormon in 1830, like many future Saints, through her family. Born October 19, 1810, in Livonia, New York, Mary A. Noble, like Hyde, had familial connections to Mormonism. Her father was close friends with Joseph Smith’s father. Even though she encountered the Book of Mormon through her father, Noble made it clear that conversion was her own choice. She wrote:

When I came to see the two Brother Youngs [Brigham and Joseph, who were visiting her father], I had a testimony in myself that they were servants of the Lord, for they looked different to me than any other men I ever saw. They carried an expression in their countenances that bespoke men of God. I was always edified when in that society, to hear them converse on the subject of Mormonism, for I realized that they

---

86Ibid., 7:431.
were in possession of something that I was not. It was my meditations
by day and by night; the principles of the gospel that they held forth on
the subject of Mormonism I knew were principles that I had never
heard preached by any other people, and I had a testimony within my-
self that it was the truth of God.87

In her autobiography, Mary A. Noble presented her conversion
as a personal choice. She converted in 1834 after hearing Joseph
Smith speak during a visit to New York. She wrote:

This was the first time I ever beheld a prophet of the Lord, and I can
truly say that [at] the first sight that I had a testimony within my bosom
that he was a man chosen of God to bring forth a great work in the last
days. . . . The principles that he brought forth and the testimony that he
bore of the truth of the Book of Mormon made a lasting impression
upon my mind. Never did hear preaching sound so glorious to me as
that did. I realized it was the truth of heaven, for I had testimony of it
myself.88

Similar to many other nineteenth-century LDS women, Mary A.
Noble revealed the important role of personal volition in receiving
the testimony. Noble did not accept the faith immediately. She had to
meditate on the issue until she knew it was the true church. Through
solitary meditation, both Hyde and Noble were able to feel in their
hearts that the LDS Church was where they belonged. Both women
used similar terms, demonstrating that the language of private and
personal conversion, both in mid-nineteenth-century popular dis-
course and in the LDS Church, emphasized the importance of feeling
a spiritual connection and experiencing a personal testimony.

Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner tells a similar story of encoun-
tering the gospel and using her individual agency to determine her
conversion. Born in Lima, New York, on April 9, 1818, Lightner
moved to Kirtland, Ohio, the first settling place of the Mormons,
when she was ten. She and her mother were baptized in October 1830
after coming into possession of one of the first copies of the Book of
Mormon. Four Mormon elders had passed through the region that
fall, and interest was high as reports circulated about Joseph Smith

87Mary A. Noble, “Mary A. Noble,” 16, typescript bound with Joseph
Bates Noble, Autobiography, ca. 1890, Ms d 1031, LDS Church History Li-
brary.

88Ibid., 18–19.
and the “Golden Bible.” Young Lightner’s curiosity was intense, due to these accounts. Her conversion experience began when she found out that a neighbor, the well-respected Isaac Morley, had a copy of the book in his possession: “Brother Morley put it [the Book of Mormon] in my hand, as I looked at it, I felt such a desire to read it, that I could not refrain from asking him to let me take it home and read it... I pled so earnestly for it... If any person in this world was ever perfectly happy in the possession of any coveted treasure I was when I had permission to read the wonderful book.”

According to her autobiography, Lightner took the book home and read it all night. Lightner had such a profound need to read the Book of Mormon that she pleaded with Brother Morley to borrow it. Similar to the other women, Lightner reported that a feeling of happiness overcome her as she read. Through her persistence with Morley and her individual study of the text day and night, Lightner came to believe in the new gospel on her own regardless of the buzz in Kirtland.

Not surprisingly, Leora Maryann Talmadge Campbell also described her conversion experience using language similar to the above-mentioned women. Campbell was born into a Methodist family on August 5, 1844. In her autobiography, she claimed that she always felt she wanted to be a Mormon but that she did not know whether the Methodist or LDS Church was true. To deal with her indecision, Leora did not seek the advice of her family. Instead, “I went into the woods so far I knew no one could hear me. I knelt down and asked the Lord to let me know in some way which church was true. I heard a voice so plain tell me ‘the Mormon Church is true.’” Through solemn prayer, Campbell was convinced of her need for baptism. Many LDS women’s autobiographies describe their search for private and personal testimony as a significant element of their conversion experience.

In contrast to Rich, Hyde, Noble, Lightner, and Campbell, who all encountered the religion through family members, Elizabeth Terry Heward, encountered Mormonism without her husband’s permission. Heward was born in the birthplace of Mormonism—Palmyra, New York—on November 17, 1814. At age twenty-three, she began her

89Lightner, “Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lighter,” 194.

conversion experience when she requested that a Mormon missionary, Theodore Turley, preach at her house in December 1837. Heward was converted not through her reading of the book but through a miracle involving the book. Another Mormon "sold me a Book of Mormon for $1.25 and Kirby [her husband] was near when I received the book and he snatched it out of my hand and threw it into the fire, which was very hot, and it went in open . . . I was across the room from the fire, but I sprang as quick as I could and took out the book, which to our great astonishment, was not burned, neither was there a letter scorched . . . Right then I received a testimony that the Book of Mormon was true."91 Eight months later, Heward was baptized. (Heward's husband never converted.) In her autobiography, Heward made it clear to the reader that her decision to convert was personal conviction that strengthened her against her husband's opposition. Heward's autobiography reveals the importance of individual agency for each of these women during their conversion experience.

Rich, Hyde, Noble, Lightner, Campbell, and Heward all described in their autobiographies that their conversion occurred through a process of community-wide or family interest followed by an autonomous persuasion to join. Each author made a point of explaining that, even though her friends and family had an interest in the gospel, she made this decision on her own. By separating their religious conversion from the group mentality, these early female converts exerted religious independence and individual agency, and created an individual experience in the Church. Through their autobiographies, these women were able to work within the patriarchal doctrine to reveal their own piety and make a place for themselves within the LDS community. These women individually chose to seek confirming spiritual experiences and to join a new religious community by documenting their conversion experiences. Through their documentation, the female narrators wanted the LDS Church to know that they were true believers.

Since these women wrote their autobiographies retrospectively, they were also conforming to LDS doctrine in how they recalled and portrayed their experiences. As demonstrated earlier, the Doctrine and Covenants stressed the importance of record-keeping and genealogy for salvation. Doctrine and Covenants 128:24 (September 6, 1842) emphasized the importance of such records for the Church and

91Heward, “A Sketch of the Life of Elizabeth Terry Heward,” 67.
its members, “Let us, therefore, as a church and a people, and as Latter-day Saints, offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness . . . a book containing the records of our dead, which shall be worthy of all acceptation.” Since the establishment of Mormonism, the Church collected autobiographies and testimonies of faith from members. Furthermore, the LDS Church encouraged and celebrated public and private testimonies of faith and conversion. Through these records, these women presented themselves as obedient members of the Church.

LDS doctrine held that conversion should be an individual experience. Moroni 10:4, a passage late in the Book of Mormon, promises a personal conversion to the sincere seeker: “And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.”

Many early converts documented receiving holy manifestations of the truth of the Book of Mormon that compelled them to accept Joseph Smith as the Prophet of the Restoration. According to historians Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, personal testimony of LDS converts often presented the claim that “they knew in their hearts” after personal experiences with God.92 From Arrington and Bitton’s research, it becomes clear that Rich, Hyde, Noble, Lightner, Campbell, and Heward used their autobiographies to show their conformity to the language of the Book of Mormon. In their testimonies, their hearts “rejoiced” that God had shown them the correct path.

Scholars have found that formulas for producing narratives appear within many faiths. In his study of twentieth-century Christian conversion narratives, anthropologist Peter G. Stromberg found that converts to Christianity slowly adopted the language of the religion. Stromberg describes this process as a “performance” created through the conversion narrative.93 Additionally, historian Martha Sonntag Bradley argues that, due to LDS women’s expansive engagement in religion during the Second Great Awakening, “the conversion experi-

92Arrington and Bitton, The Mormon Experience, 23.
ence served as a rite of passage through which women became fully absorbed in religious life.” In her study of nineteenth-century female LDS conversion narratives, Bradley found that the narratives used a “common stock of words, phrases (some biblical), and themes.”94 Similarly, Edkins found that “virtually every” Quaker and Puritan woman autobiographer in eighteenth-century America followed a “recognizable formula of religious experience.” By following this formula, women confirmed “the standard patterning of religious experience as established by the sect” and thus became “bonded” with the community. Similar to Rich, Hyde, Noble, Lightner, Campbell, and Heward, the Puritan and Quaker women frequently recited in their autobiographies “the struggles to find the inner light, salvation or grace” and the attempt to establish a “binding relationship with God.”95

By using a common stock of words and themes, nineteenth-century LDS women were able to confirm their place in the community while also conforming to doctrinal instructions. LDS women wrote formulaic autobiographies, yet these very autobiographies demonstrate that they were not passively reciting LDS expectations. Instead, they sought ways to work within the culture, asserting their own piety and claiming a place for themselves within the LDS community. Through their writings, these women were individually choosing to become believing members of the religious community by documenting their conversion experiences. While each LDS woman conformed to Mormon doctrine in her autobiography, each also demonstrated individual agency by claiming the conversion experience as her own. It appears that these women, through their writings, chose to be Mormon on their own by creating personal testimonies. Through their autobiographies, these women wanted the LDS Church to know that they were true believers from the beginning and that they followed the gospel that Joseph Smith presented.

**WRITING ABOUT HEALING HANDS AND SEEING EYES**

Another commonality present in the autobiographies of early female converts is the documentation of healings and visions that re-affirmed the truth of the gospel presented by Joseph Smith and the
Book of Mormon. LDS women commonly practiced healings and experienced visions. In Kirtland, Ohio, as early as June 1831, LDS members were endowed with the ability to heal and provide blessings for the ailing. Furthermore, at Kirtland in 1835, Joseph Smith Sr. endowed some LDS women with the ability to heal.\textsuperscript{96} Beginning in 1842, the Relief Society organized women who visited and aided ailing or pregnant women. These women were charged with blessing, healing, and providing medical care for sick women.\textsuperscript{97} Although nineteenth-century LDS women could not act as missionaries, providing healings and blessings for their suffering sisters allowed LDS women agency and power in the patriarchal church. (During the twentieth century, healings and blessings slowly became the domain of the priesthood.\textsuperscript{98}) LDS women who documented visions and healings in their autobiographies demonstrated both a deep commitment to the LDS Church and a sense of living out the gospel. The autobiographies of Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich, Elizabeth Terry Heward, and Martha Pane Jones Thomas provide examples of the healings recounted in many autobiographies; and Lightner, Phoebe W. Carter Woodruff, and Cordelia Calista Morley Cox provide examples of visions.

Visions and revelations were not extraordinary within the Mormon faith; claims of seeing and speaking to God were common in the mid-nineteenth century across the United States.\textsuperscript{99} Joseph Smith received the gospel through visions, and he came to believe that he had been called to restore the true Church of Christ after a vision. Two individuals appeared to him in a “pillar of light” and forbade his joining any existing denominations because they were all wrong.\textsuperscript{100} This “First Vision” led to many more, including the angelic visitations that ultimately transmitted the “golden plates” from which Smith trans-

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{97}Derr, Cannon, and Beecher, \textit{Women of Covenant}, 36.
\textsuperscript{100}Shipps, \textit{Mormonism}, 9.
\end{flushleft}
lated the Book of Mormon. Visions and healings became a method for LDS men and women to practice actively their faith. The use of and belief in healings and visions to create an active role in the LDS Church is present in the women’s autobiographies in this study as well.

While living in Pontusuc, Illinois, in 1843, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner suffered from chills and a fever. She prayed to get well, but her doctor told her there was no hope. One night she dreamed “that an angel came to me and said if I would go to Nauvoo and call for a Brother Cutler, that worked on the temple, to administer to me, I should be healed.” Her husband immediately accompanied her Nauvoo, and they found Alpheus Cutler, whom they had never met. “He administered to me” through pronouncing a blessing of healing by the laying on of hands, “and I got up and walked to the fire, alone. In two weeks I was able to take care of my children.” Through a miracle, Cutler had healed Lightner from what appeared to be a terminal illness. While this healing is important, Lightner’s dream of an angel parallels Joseph Smith’s visions leading to the translation of the Book of Mormon. Lightner’s belief that the dream was legitimate was probably influenced by her profound belief in the visions of Joseph Smith.

In March 1839, Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich became ill and thought she was going to die. After being confined to her bed for six weeks, she received a patriarchal blessing from Joseph Smith Sr., the Prophet’s father, during which the “Spirit of the Lord was poured out upon him that he blessed me with a long life, and said I should speedily recover, and gave me such a blessing that all in the room were weeping for joy.” Rich “commenced to get better right away” and was rapidly healed due to the “power of the Lord.”

Elizabeth Terry Heward documented a healing at the hands of her husband. After the death of her first husband, Elizabeth married John Heward. On June 8, 1846, they began the journey west from Nauvoo to Utah. Elizabeth Heward became sick with “Cholera Morbus” during the night of June 20 while sleeping on the prairie. In her autobiography she recalled, “Thought I would die for a drink.” Her husband laid his hands on her head and “through the mercy of the

Lord, I got better and was able to go on the next morning.”

Martha Pane Jones Thomas, a resident of Tennessee who converted to Mormonism in 1835, also documented a healing experience in her autobiography. In 1837 on her way to Missouri, Thomas became sick with “sun pain.” Her husband, Daniel S. Thomas, asked what he could do for her. Thomas asked for Brother Sherwood, a member of the company, to come give her a healing blessing. Brother Sherwood and Brother Smoot, also a member of the company, “laid their hands” on Martha’s head and gave her a blessing of healing, which immediately cured her. She wrote about the experience, “I felt a calm, quiet, spirit go from my head to my feet. Brother Sherwood said I should be healed from that moment; so I was. The pain and soreness of my eyes were all gone.” Thomas rose from her bed the next day, baked, and did the washing.

Lightner, Rich, Heward, and Thomas all documented in their autobiographies that male LDS members healed them. These women demonstrated a belief in the power of male priesthood and its ability to heal although their own role in exercising faith is an important part of the narrative. All four women demonstrated a belief in the same kind of miracles that was a dominant theme in the New Testament and in the restoration of New Testament Christianity that Mormonism claimed to be. Similar miracles appear in the Book of Mormon as well. In Mormonism, only men are ordained to priesthood. The higher, or Melchizedek Priesthood, had the “privilege of receiving the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” while the Aaronic, or lesser priesthood, bestowed the ability to “administer in outward ordinances, the letter of the gospel” (D&C 107:19–20; March 28, 1835). With these powers, or “keys” as the LDS Church calls them, members believed men could administer healings. The LDS women documented their healings to demonstrate their commitment and belief in the LDS Church. Through their writings, LDS women

---

104Heward, “A Sketch of the Life of Elizabeth Terry Heward,” 72–73.


106There is debate whether women, through the Relief Society, were given priesthood “keys.” While women in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century documented their ability to heal, women’s healings are now considered unorthodox. See Bradley, “Seizing Sacred Space,”
autobiographers witnessed to the reader (including Church leaders and their own descendants) that they believed in the gospel by providing examples of how they practiced the gospel daily.

Not only did many of the LDS women document their faith in the gift of healing but they also recorded their own religious visions. Mary Lightner wrote about a vision she received when she sought enlightenment on the troubling practice of plural marriage, another aspect of Joseph Smith’s “restoration,” but this time from the Old Testament. Joseph Smith privately taught her that she was to become his plural wife; resistant, Lightner told Smith that she did not know whether to believe plural marriage was a revelation from God and that she wanted to “know for myself.” Lightner sought seclusion among some haystacks where she could pray privately:

As I knelt down I thought, why not pray as Moses did? He prayed with his hands raised. . . . I lifted my hands and I have heard Joseph say that angels covered their faces. I knelt down and if ever a poor mortal prayed, I did. A few nights after that an angel of the Lord came to me and if ever a thrill went through a mortal, it went through me. I gazed upon the clothes and figure but the eyes were like lightning. They pierced me from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet. I was frightened almost to death for a moment. . . . The angel leaned over me and the light was very great, although it was night.107

The following Sabbath, Smith approached Lightner and told her that the angelic visitation meant that she should accept his offer. Subsequently, Brigham Young performed a ceremony of “sealing” that married Lightner and Joseph Smith. Similar to her healing, Lightner described how she exercised faith to solve her problem. The truth about plural marriage came to Lightner in the same manner as Smith’s first angelic vision that led to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Lightner claimed that she found an answer to her problem through this vision. Additionally, she exercised an aspect of prayer that was not customary to her in praying with uplifted hands, as Moses did (Ex. 17:11–12). Through her prayer, Lightner employed the


107Lightner, “The Life and Testimony of Mary Elizabeth Lightner,” 2.
religious vocabulary of posture and gesture as evidence of her sincerity in seeking an answer. Lightner’s documentation of this event was powerful, demonstrating that she believed she had a right to seek spiritual confirmation and, in fact, did so.108

A similar doubt about plural marriage and then confirmation of its truth is also evident in the autobiography of Phoebe W. Carter Woodruff. Phoebe Woodruff was born in Scarboro, Maine, on March 8, 1807, and was baptized in 1834. In 1835, she left her family and moved to Kirtland, Ohio, where she married future apostle and Church president Wilford Woodruff. When presented with the concept that her husband needed to take plural wives in Nauvoo, Illinois, she thought it was “the most wicked thing I ever heard of; consequently I opposed it to the best of my ability, until I became sick and wretched.” Through unremitting prayer, she came to realize that the revelation was true: “As soon, however, as I became convinced that it originated as a revelation from God through Joseph, and knowing him to be a prophet, I wrestled with my Heavenly Father in Fervent prayer, to be guided aright at that all-important moment of my life. The answer came. Peace was given to my mind. I knew it was the will of God; and from that time to the present I have sought to faithfully honor the patriarchal law.”109

Like Lightner, Woodruff wrestled with the challenge to her faith. However, the spirit of the Lord comforted her and swept away her doubts. Using language vaguely similar to Joseph Smith’s visions, Phoebe Woodruff demonstrated a belief in his work. By doubting her revelation, she would therefore have doubted Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling and, in turn, would have doubted her conversion. To avoid a contradiction, Woodruff turned inward and prayed about her faith, receiving a spiritual consolation that confirmed Mormonism’s truth for herself, including the difficult concept of plural marriage.

The autobiography of Cordelia Calista Morley Cox also demonstrates the manner in which LDS women used visions to gain authority. Cox converted to Mormonism with her family in 1831 in Kirtland, Ohio. More than a decade later, while living in Nauvoo, Illinois, Cox and her community experienced persecution from

108Ibid., 2–3.
non-Mormons. In about 1846, she privately sought refuge in prayer when non-Mormons told her that her religion “was false” and that she “had been deceived.” She wrote, “I began to worry and to wonder if I had in these ears been so deceived, I longed for a testimony from my Father in Heaven, to know for myself whether I was right or wrong.” Cox described the dream that she had one night after praying for such a testimony: “I thought I was in the midst of a multitude of people. President Young arose and spoke to the people. He then said there would be [a] spirit go around to whisper comfort in the ear of everyone. All was silent as death as I sat. Then the spirit came to me and whispered in my ear these words, ‘Don’t ever change your condition or wish it otherwise,’ for I was better off than thousands and thousands of others.”

Cox thus came to peace with this issue. She wrote, “The Lord has been my guide; in Him I put my trust.” Cox’s dream demonstrates the importance these women placed on seeking answers to problems for themselves and their belief in the power of religious mechanisms, like the dreams and visions used by LDS leaders. These women may not have had powerful positions within the LDS Church; but to help them understand the faith, they used the same methods as the male leadership. In Cox’s dream, her certitude came as she listened in faith to Brigham Young’s promise that a spirit would speak comfort to her.

Cox’s experience is similar to Lightner’s experience. Neither found answers to their problems through their own thoughts but rather through an angelic vision. This dependent relationship demonstrates the women’s recognition of the importance of male leadership in their own divine role. LDS women in the nineteenth century used visions to deal with conflicts they had with LDS doctrine and to reestablish their belief. Through documenting healings and visions in their autobiographies, LDS women presented their lives as living out the gospel. In her study of twentieth-century visionary narratives of pregnant LDS women, Margaret K. Brady argues that the documentation of visions “provides her [the LDS woman] with the personal knowledge of the strength of her own spirituality,” which is then pre-

---


111 Ibid.
resented to the LDS community through the narrative. Similar to Brady’s case studies, through their documentation of healings and visions, the women narrators I analyze here wanted the LDS Church to know they were true believers from the beginning and that they followed the gospel presented by the Prophet Joseph Smith. While the women may have been using language familiar from Mormon scriptures and their community in describing their healings and visions, their belief in miracles demonstrated their desire to claim power and recognition within the Church.

LDS women were neither separate nor different from women in other religious communities in their use of doctrine to claim power. Edkins documented a similar phenomenon in her research on eighteenth-century spiritual autobiographies of Quaker and Puritan women. According to Edkins, a Puritan woman made an initial bond with the community through the conversion process. However, by documenting and testifying to her community in her autobiography, “she then became an acknowledged visible saint, a member of the Elect.” Medieval scholar Elizabeth Petroff studied female saints in thirteenth-century Italy and found that women in religions that placed them in subordinate roles used visions to obtain power within the limits of their faith community. Petroff argues that a saint’s visions allowed the woman to become part of the “heavenly hierarchy” even though she was “excluded from the earthly hierarchy of the church.” The visions women narrated, according to Petroff, gave each woman “a voice and a belief in herself as chosen to speak.”

I argue that these Mormon women were becoming “Saints” by documenting experiences similar to those in Mormon scriptures and spiritual experiences shared within the Mormon community. While each LDS woman may have used autobiography to conform to Church doctrine, she also demonstrated her agency by claiming faith in healings, the ability to experience visions, and other gifts of the Spirit that lie outside the scope of this article. (Examples are speaking

113Edkins, “Quest for Community,” 41.
in tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy, among others, which are listed not only in 1 Corinthians 12:7–11, but are repeated in the Book of Mormon (Alma 9:21), and Doctrine and Covenants 46:11–25). None of these scriptures imply that they are the exclusive prerogatives of priesthood leaders, although Joseph Smith (and subsequent LDS Church presidents) used revelations (including visions). While the women knew they could not obtain priesthood or originate official doctrine, through visions and healings they shaped their own belief in the doctrine. Many LDS women claimed a form of authority, though not priesthood, for themselves.

As demonstrated above, nineteenth-century LDS women created their autobiographies for reasons other than documenting their lives. I argue that these women had additional tasks in mind. Similarly, in her study of twentieth-century LDS women’s oral testimonies, literary scholar Elaine J. Lawless found that many twentieth-century LDS women gave testimonies to grasp what little power LDS doctrine gave them. Lawless states, “Mormon women seem to believe that even though they have little or no power or authority in the church . . . they can lose what little they have available to them.”¹¹⁶ She concluded that “Mormon women are doing their very best to accept the limited roles allotted to them and to maintain their subordinate position in exchange for the promise of a place in the Celestial Kingdom.”¹¹⁷ My research adds to this growing literature on LDS women’s writings to expose the important role that nineteenth-century LDS women claimed through writing their autobiographies. By wielding their pens, LDS women dealt with strict nineteenth-century gender roles and their inability to become missionaries.

The LDS Church emphasized women’s primary role as motherhood but encouraged all members, women as well as men, to record their history. Together these commandments gave women an opportunity to become active participants in the LDS Church. By actively encouraging women to write autobiographies, the LDS Church presented women with an opportunity to use their motherhood role in a powerful way. The women could become metaphoric missionaries through their pens. While LDS doctrine appeared restrictive for women, many nineteenth-century LDS women found a way to gain their

¹¹⁶Lawless, “I Know If I Don’t Bear My Testimony, I’ll Lose It,” 93.
¹¹⁷Ibid., 94.
own power and have influence in the Church. Nineteenth-century LDS women used the encouragement to write their personal histories to liberate themselves from their subordinate position and create a powerful position as teachers for future generations.\footnote{118}{Andrews, To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), xi, argues that ex-slaves found the “writing of autobiography . . . uniquely self-liberating.”}

The act of writing provided these women with a venue for illuminating their importance in the LDS Church. Edkins concludes her study of female Puritan and Quaker spiritual autobiographies by stating, “These spiritual autobiographies were not written by rebels or artists but by women who searched very hard and sometimes very long for a niche and who, once having found it, symbolically celebrated their sense of community via the written word.”\footnote{119}{Edkins, “Quest for Community,” 52.} Similarly, the autobiographies of early female converts to the LDS Church suggests that not only did these women seek to convince others to convert to the gospel but they also sought to convince Church leaders that they themselves had become dedicated followers and should be included in the official Church narratives.

LDS women during the nineteenth century were no different from secular women who attempted to work within the limitations of their subordinate status to achieve power and identity within their community. Nineteenth-century white women, regardless of religion, did not enjoy the same legal and political status as men. The restrictions on LDS women were not extremely different from restrictions on non-LDS women. Both groups of women had to negotiate independence from a subordinate position in their respective communities. Moreover, coverture legally “covered” and took away women’s legal rights just as LDS doctrine dictated that women serve their male leaders who were exercising priesthood. Mormon women depended on patriarchs for their religious status, and secular women depended on men for their legal status. Secular women were bound by the “cult of true womanhood” and LDS women by Mormon motherhood.\footnote{120}{Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood,” 151–74.}

Both groups of women struggled to find power within their assigned status. The Second Great Awakening’s emphasis on individualism gave women a spiritual avenue within which to create their own
self-identity. Women found religion to be a haven from societal constrictions and were able to find a voice for themselves, even within the religious restrictions, because of the new ideals of personal salvation and individualism. While they did not escape coverture or the “cult of true womanhood,” religious women used their faith to articulate an individual identity and relationship with God. Within Mormonism, women used the doctrine of record-keeping to claim a voice.

Furthermore, the study of LDS women’s autobiographies demonstrates the importance of studying autobiographies to understand marginalized people in history. Nineteenth-century LDS autobiography gave voices to women who are rarely the center of history and only recently studied. This research sheds light on how women perceived their divine role. Reading the religious texts and histories of male LDS members does not reveal how women felt but only what they should have felt. The women’s autobiographies unveil what LDS women believed their role was in the Church, while also exposing the Church’s expectations for members. In his study of American autobiographical writings, Robert Sayre argues that autobiographies are able to “reveal as much about the author’s assumed audience as they do about him or her, and this is a further reason why they need to be read as cultural documents, not just as personal ones.” Historians should take heed. Studying LDS autobiographies as “cultural documents” shows that LDS women felt pressure from the Church to live up to the ideal of LDS motherhood and exposes the formulaic structure women used to grasp a respected and divine role.

However, this project discloses only part of the valuable information available in nineteenth-century LDS women’s autobiographies. Further research is necessary to understand and complicate the typical image of nineteenth-century Mormon women as helpless victims. Historians should explore how the autobiographies of U.S.-born women differ from European converts. Additionally, a comparison of the autobiographies of married couples may provide insight into gender roles within LDS families. Furthermore, research comparing LDS women’s autobiographies and other Christian women’s autobiographies may reveal more similarities than differences in the position of women from different religious movements in the nineteenth century. As this study shows, autobiographies can provide his-

tarians with information on how LDS women wanted their life to be remembered and how they saw themselves fitting into the Church history.

Through their autobiographies, LDS women made a place for themselves in a male-controlled church, while they also followed the male Church leadership. Women were able to carve out their own little niche through their writing while also sustaining a male-dominant system. I hypothesize, based on “Viola’s” 1890 article, that many second- and third-generation LDS women were probably struggling with their desire to become missionaries and found that their voice could serve them well at home. “Viola” encouraged them: “Now, my dear girls, I hope you will labor . . . and who shall say that your mission is any less noble and grand than that of your brothers’ who proclaim the gospel to the nations of the earth? Are not the souls of those born in Zion, as precious in the Lord’s sight, as those who are brought from afar? and is not she who makes repentance possible and desirable for an erring sister, as deserving of the plaudit, ‘Well done thou good and faithful servant,’ as he who compasses sea and land in his Master’s service?”

The LDS women who used their autobiographies to proselytize to their own descendants and to other readers, particularly in the rising generation, created a space for female agency in the LDS Church. Many of the women who converted to the Mormon Church in the nineteenth century wrote autobiographies to define their place within the patriarchal religion by documenting their conversion experience, visions, and healings but by also using their pens to teach future generations about their faith. Using ink, LDS women labored hard to spread and prove their faith. They were faithful, yet independent, servants.

---

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST’S EVOLVING APPROACH TO MISSION

Steven L. Shields

FROM ITS BEGINNINGS, THE RELIGIOUS organization brought into being by Joseph Smith Jr., Sidney Rigdon, and others based its mission on “right belief” in certain principles of faith believed to be “correct doctrine” and adhering to a “correct pattern” of church organization and priesthood. This message, with the Book of Mormon as its focus, was particularly relevant to people in the United States in the early nineteenth century and spoke to many of their important concerns of life and faith.1

Missionary efforts were directed to the friends, relatives, and

STEVEN L. SHIELDS {sshields@cofchrist.org}, past president of John Whitmer Historical Association (2011–12), is an independent historian whose best-known work is Divergent Paths of the Restoration. In addition to several books, he has published articles in various scholarly journals, has served on the editorial boards of Restoration Studies and John Whitmer Historical Association Journal, and is a past editor of the annual Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society-Korea Branch. He has lived or worked in several countries in Asia, including Korea for twelve years, where he was a missionary, pastor, and president of the Community of Christ East Asia Mission Center. Having served the Church in full-time roles since 1987, he is currently assigned to the Church’s International Headquarters. He presented an abbreviated version of this paper at the forty-seventh annual conference of the Mormon History Association at Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

1Richard P. Howard, The Church through the Years, Vol. 1 (Independ-
network of acquaintances of the founding brothers and sisters. Most, if not all, early converts to the new religion were of a Western Christian cultural heritage, if not already active participants in one Christian fellowship or another.2

As the young church expanded both its boundaries and membership, missionary efforts continued along the networks of family and friends, reaching into Canada, and then to the British Isles. From there, the Church eventually extended its reach into Scandinavia and the European continent. Early efforts also took missionaries to Australia, the Pacific, and South America.3 In almost every case, those encountered by the missionaries were people of Western or European Christian-influenced cultures.

The missionaries’ message was that they represented the “only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth.” The mission was that people should abandon whatever Christian church they currently belonged to and be baptized again by those having authority, for their eternal salvation. The hope was that the next life would be better than this life (Doctrine and Covenants 1:5e; LDS 1:30).

In the years that followed Joseph Smith Jr.’s assassination, the Church became fragmented, with many competing for primacy of leadership. The once-unified membership was divided into many groups, disagreeing over both leadership and doctrine. Mostly, though, the primary message and mission had not changed from that of the original church,4 except with the added layer that a particular leader was the “legitimate successor.”5

---

140

The Journal of Mormon History


2See, for example, the stories of the Morley Family at Kirtland, Ohio, and Sidney Rigdon’s network of congregations in the region, in Mark Lyman Staker, Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), chaps. 5–6.

3Howard, The Church through the Years, Vol. 1, 281–82.

4I use the term “original church” to refer to the church that existed during the lifetime of Joseph Smith Jr. only.
When the “New Organization” of the Church began forming in the early 1850s, leading up to reorganizing the Church’s leading councils in 1860, its mission was reshaped by the events of the intervening years and struggles over leadership and doctrinal matters. Richard P. Howard, Community of Christ historian, wrote, “They saw their task largely to reclaim former co-workers in the Latter Day faith. The elders launched extended missionary ventures seeking old friends and relatives with whom they could share their newfound hope.”

The Church spent the next century distinguishing itself from its Utah-based competitor by proclaiming itself the sole legitimate, authoritative, and “true” continuation of the original Church. Literature published by the Church well into the 1970s proclaimed this distinction by denouncing the Utah Church. Early missionary efforts took Church representatives along the same missionary paths as those blazed by missionaries in the 1830s and 1840s—the British Isles,
Europe, Scandinavia, Australia, and the Pacific.\textsuperscript{11}

The essential message remained the same: The Church was the “only true church” because God, through Joseph Smith Jr. alone, had restored both the Church and the priesthood. Leaders and members commonly understood and believed, as Elbert A. Smith, the son of David Hyrum Smith, argued:

\begin{quote}
We hold that God did restore the church in modern times, along with its original doctrines, and also by direct revelation restored the right to administer baptism after the original mode practiced in the days of Christ and the apostles.

. . . that when the church reappeared from the wilderness, and was restored after the long apostasy, it would be organically the same church that God and Christ planned—the old Jerusalem church.

When you find it today, it will have apostles and prophets, as well as evangelists, bishops, elders, pastors, priests, teachers, deacons—all the officers set in the church of old for the “work of the ministry.”\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Elbert Smith also declared, “We believe on a thousand evidences and testimonies that God has expressed himself through [Community of Christ] and that through it has come the line of succession in the prophetic office.”\textsuperscript{13}

By the mid-1950s, leaders knew that the Church needed to respond to the new world that emerged in the economic prosperity and baby boom after the Second World War. There was a new awareness that its century-old message did not connect with the realities of members who lived in lands and cultures far removed from the “center

for example, his pamphlets “Revelation Today,” and “Reorganization History Speaks to Our Day.” The best-known example of this literature from the 1960s is Aleah G. Koury’s \textit{The Truth and the Evidence: A Comparison between Doctrines of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints} (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1965).

\textsuperscript{11}Edwards, \textit{Our Legacy of Faith}, 147.


\textsuperscript{13}Elbert A. Smith, \textit{Differences that Persist between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Utah Mormon Church} (Independence: Herald Publishing House, 1950), 61.
Community of Christ’s Temple at Independence, Missouri, was dedicated in 1994. Copyright Community of Christ 2012. Photo by staff photographer. Used by permission.
This recognition was a theological, cultural, and political challenge to the assumed message and mission of the Church. Somehow the Book of Mormon’s declaration that God’s new chosen land was the American continent (never specifying North or South, and perhaps meaning both), was replaced with the view that the United States was God’s chosen government and political entity. For example, in the 1940s and 1950s, the Church directed its members in Europe to learn English because it was the “language of the church.” Although many complied with the direction, such a policy caused resentment.

Today, the message of the Church and its understanding of mission and its history is broader—explained with language that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Several events in the life of the Church converged during the 1950s and 1960s, on which the Church has built its current understanding.

TAHITI AND A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF ZION

Tahitian Church members, keenly aware of the realities of the changed world in the years after the Second World War, challenged Prophet-President Israel A. Smith about the essential meaning of the Zionic endeavor during his 1950 visit to the Church in French Polynesia. The impractical ideal of “gathering to Zion” (as a fixed geography in Jackson County, Missouri) was at the heart of the challenge. In addition to cultural and language issues were political issues, such as the difficulty of getting immigrant visas.

As Smith considered this perspective, he realized that the traditional understanding of the Zionic endeavor described a world that had long since disappeared. In response to his prayers, he proclaimed, he received a revelation that he announced to the Tahitians gathered at a conference in the town of Taravao. This July 29, 1950, revelation affirmed the worth of all lands, peoples, and cultures of the Church, and directed the members to gather to centers in their native

---

14 “Center place” was the name used by the Church to refer to Independence, “the center place of Zion” (D&C 57:1d, 149:6a, 156:3, 157:8; LDS 57:3; no LDS equivalent for 149, 156, 157).

15 Kees A. Compier, interviewed by Steven Shields, May 17, 2012. Compier was born into and raised in Community of Christ in The Netherlands. Notes, audio recordings, and transcripts of interviews that I have conducted and that are cited in this article are in my possession.
areas and build Zionic communities everywhere, rather than exclusively in Jackson County, Missouri.  

**KOREA**

The years immediately after the end of hostilities in the Korean War brought an even more significant shift in the worldview of Community of Christ. An increasing number of American members became short-term residents of Korea and Japan, as military, diplomatic, or government employees. The Church had not experienced the cultural differences between the West and Asia before, and the confrontation required a paradigm shift. Richard P. Howard explained how the post-war years brought about a broadening mission and challenged the Church’s traditional message and models:

Military personnel had gone beyond the cultural boundaries of their worlds. Many had seen human suffering, need, and promise beyond what they could have imagined. Within some of them burned the conviction to create a better world for those they had discovered in far-away places. When [Community of Christ] leaders learned of William Wenham’s baptism of seventeen Koreans during his military tour there in the early 1950s, they knew the church had an obligation in Korea that would not go away. Before long, the Council of Twelve had a research committee at work, looking at possibilities of overseas expansion. The 1959 exploratory mission to the Orient taken by D. Blair Jensen and a new apostle, Charles D. Neff, derived in large measure from the evangelistic passion, plus the wider worldview, of many [Community of Christ] members and leaders. That Jensen-Neff Orient survey opened the door to today’s church, in all its newfound cultural diversity.

The Church into which Bill Wenham baptized those first Ko-

---

16Israel A. Smith, “To the Saints Assembled at Taravao, Greeting,” holographic manuscript, July 29, 1950, P18–21, Community of Christ Library-Archives, Independence. Mark A. Scherer, Community of Christ Historian-Archivist, interviewed by Steven Shields, June 12, 2012, stated that the members of the Church in Tahiti today still question why Smith’s 1950 revelation was never added to the Doctrine and Covenants.


The first permanent Community of Christ building in Korea was built in Yonhidong, a neighborhood in the western part of Seoul. The building was dedicated in 1963 and served the needs of the church there for forty years. Photo courtesy of Community of Christ Archives. Used by permission.

rean converts had the traditional ideas of “one true church,” an emphasis on Jackson County, Missouri, as the land of Zion, a Western-style model of worship and congregational organization, and an emphasis on the salvific nature of the sacraments. Translations of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants were completed early in the history of the Church in East Asia.19

Les Gardner, a lifelong member from Australia, was one of Community of Christ’s first missionaries to live and work in Korea.

19Although translation work had been completed earlier, the books were published in the early 1970s. The Japanese edition of the Book of Mormon was published in 1971, Korean in 1973, and Chinese in 1974. Community of Christ translations were done independently of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints translations of the same books. For the Book of Mormon in all three languages, Community of Christ specifically chose the word for “book” rather than the word for “scripture” as used by the LDS Church.
Church leaders in the United States believed that the traditional message was universally applicable. They reasoned that, because the message from America as heard in Australia made sense to thousands of members there and because Australia was a different culture from the United States, the message should make sense everywhere. Gardner was surprised when he found most Koreans unreceptive, even though Koreans were more accepting than Japanese. This difference was probably due to Korea’s long history with Christian missions, as well as an activist element among those who embraced Christianity; several prominent Christians had signed the 1919 Korean declaration of independence from the Empire of Japan.

Despite Korea’s familiarity with Christianity, one of the challenges for missionaries in the 1960s was that few Koreans were Christians. Buddhism provided the spiritual foundations for the Korean people, but society was founded on Confucianism. In Korea, no longer could Community of Christ’s mission be about persuading Christians to leave their faith communities for the “one true” organization. Some of the Church’s most basic ideas, long accepted as absolutes, were being called into question.

Les Gardner said that he began to understand “true church” in the context of a truth-based message. The important distinction was not the exclusivity that had been typical of the Church until then but rather confidence in the Church’s efforts to be true to its sense and understanding of God’s call—the historical story of the Church being descriptive of those efforts rather than the focus of faith.

Besides the spiritual facets of mission in Korea, there were also the practical realities of relieving human suffering, especially in the decade after the Korean War. Korea was economically devastated after almost forty years of brutal Japanese occupation rule that de-


21Gardner, Interview.


23Gardner, Interview.
Located about one mile from the original Church property in Yonhidong, this new building was dedicated in May 2009. It serves the local congregation and is headquarters for the East Asia Mission Center. Photo by Steven L. Shields.
stroyed the environment and the Korean culture. The Korean War had only compounded the problems. Gardner said that, not long after he arrived in Korea, the Church’s mission became focused on the social welfare and educational development of the people—making the kingdom of God a reality for this life and not just the next. From about 1962 onward, the Korean government began requiring religious organizations to justify their continued tax-free status by engaging in work that helped the whole society, rather than just their own institutions. Juggling language study, Church administration, welfare and education projects, and leadership training and development pushed the missionaries to the limits of their time, energy, and abilities. However, these challenges reshaped the mission of the Church and had an impact on its message.

Resident missionaries served in Korea until the mid-1970s, when responsibility was given fully to Korean Church leaders. Then, after a twenty-year absence, resident missionaries were again assigned to Korea, beginning in 1996, with added duties as president of the Church’s East Asia Mission Center (comprising Korea, Japan, and Taiwan). The Church continues to be challenged with leadership development needs and missional strategy, particularly due to the economic growth of Korea, which now has a standard of living similar to that of the United States. From my personal experience, it is clear that many of the welfare and education projects in which the Church formerly engaged are no longer relevant.

One challenge to leadership development in Korea is that Korean people are naturally relational. Strong connections are forged between members and the resident missionary families; but when the missionaries leave, many of the members have little or no further connection with the


26Gardner, Interview.

27Ibid.

28I was assigned to Korea in 1996 and served both as pastor of the Seoul congregation and as mission center president until 2004.

Church, relationships being highly personal rather than institutional. Leadership development takes a generation or more, but missionaries have usually been rotated out of Korea after six to eight years.\(^{30}\)

Jac Kirkpatrick, who served as the apostle responsible for Korea from 1996 to 2007, said that the focus of the message in Korea was not directed to other Christians as much as to people who were “getting beat up by their own culture.” By “establishing community that is Christ centered,” he said, we can help to “enrich the lives of folks who probably weren’t living very rich lives” in their current circumstances. His hope was that Community of Christ in Korea, as well as other parts of Asia, could bring a “more genuinely relational ministry to a culture that nowadays is very, very secular.” Kirkpatrick also expressed concern about the rapid rotation of key leaders who were needed to mentor local leaders; changing this practice was important so that the Church could develop solid foundations for indigenization.\(^{31}\)

**INDIA**

When interest in the Church took root in India with baptisms in 1958, the Church felt seriously its pastoral obligation to these new members. However, the several years of experience in Japan and Korea suggested to Apostle Neff the need for a different approach. He moved out in faith and allowed local leaders who only minimally understood what Community of Christ was all about to develop the Church as it emerged, according to their own understanding of Community of Christ’s values and emphases—even though that understanding might be different from that of Church members in the United States.\(^{32}\)

In describing the missions in India and Africa, Neff explained, “People responded to the meaning of the gospel in the midst of their lives rather than to a set of prescribed doctrinal concepts.”\(^{33}\) As one manifestation of that response, for example, the Church in India


\(^{32}\)For a brief sketch of the early years of Community of Christ in India, see Howard, *The Church through the Years, Vol. 2*, 335–37.

\(^{33}\)Charles Neff, quoted in Barbara Howard, “Objectives Continue to
widely uses more recent sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, but the Book of Mormon has not been translated.34

In the strongly non-Christian and Christian-unfriendly Hindu nationalistic culture of India, what is the essential mission of the Church? What obligations does the Church have when working among people who are often the poorest of the poor, lacking basic health care, adequate food, and even marginal literacy? Is the purpose of the Church to simply administer ordinances of salvation for the next life only, or do discipleship and Jesus’s declarations that the “kingdom of God is at hand” inform a mission that should try to make salvation something that can be grasped in this life? These important questions continue to guide the mission of the Church in India.

From the beginning of the work in India, contact with Western Church leaders and members has been limited. No resident missionaries were assigned due to Apostle Neff’s emerging philosophy of mission and the importance of developing indigenized leadership.35 Neff’s policy continues today throughout Community of Christ, with local leaders serving in their own cultures and nations, including key administrative roles. Resident expatriate leaders or missionaries are a rare exception.

Apostle Neff and his successors in the Council of Twelve who were responsible for Asia, made infrequent and short visits to India, leaving matters mostly in the hands of local priesthood leaders. For example, during the seven years I served in India, I made an average of four visits a year of between three and five weeks’ duration—and India has a lot of territory to cover. Leaders from both International Headquarters and India continue to face critical questions of message and mission, as well as the practical problems of leadership development and training.

Apostle Neff opted for a basic approach and decided that the leaders in India would not be indoctrinated according to the Western model. Only the basics of Church policy have been introduced. Con-

---


34I supervised Community of Christ translation work and the leadership development program in India, 2004–10.

35During the 1960s and 1970s, India was in a strong military and political alliance with the Soviet Union and had cool relations with the United States. A strong sense of nationalism also made it difficult to obtain resident missionary visas for Westerners.
Community of Christ was first established in India in the late 1950s at Chennai. Several hundred miles to the south, the congregation at Madurai, a major city in southern India, was started by relatives of early Church members living in Chennai. Photo by Steven L. Shields.
gregations in India are generally organized with an elder in charge. A few Aaronic Priesthood members are shared among several congregations. Local music forms are permitted in worship, rather than requiring imported Western hymnody. A focus on the centrality of Jesus Christ to the life of faith has been more important than the history of the denomination.

Howard S. (“Bud”) Sheehy, the apostle responsible for India from 1970 to 1978, and a counselor in the First Presidency (1978–2000), reflected in an interview that the essence of the mission and message of the Church is “the way we feel [that] God’s love for others puts on us an obligation to help them in this life. We have something of value to offer people—whether it be parenting skills in the inner city or crop rotation in India. We don’t have a gospel of the afterlife. The kingdom of God on earth is for here and now.”

Most Community of Christ members in India are low caste or “tribals” (groups that are not included in the caste system). They have traditionally been denied access to education, communication, or economic opportunity beyond basic survival. Andrew Bolton, who began serving as the apostle responsible for India in 2007, said that, for Church members in India, “Christianity offers them a better deal. So though they may still be persecuted and discriminated against in the wider Indian society, they’re not having to deal with internalizing a message that says ‘you’re inferior.’ Christians live to the quality of loving neighbors as yourself. It’s a rise in status. There’s a positive message they’re receiving; it dignifies them and their families.”

At the same time, Bolton expressed some regret that more was not done in the early years to develop the broad-based ministry inherent in the several priesthood offices, as well as more emphasis on what he sees as the fundamental ideas of community, peace, and justice. During his leadership of the Church in India, he has worked toward adding these essential facets. Community of Christ continues to help members and friends in India develop better access to education and medical services, in addition to the spiritual elements of the Church’s mission.

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

Community of Christ scholar Matthew Bolton noted that the Church’s “expansion into East Asia, rather than ‘transforming the society of Japan’ as Apostle Charles D. Neff had naively hoped challenged the whole [Community of Christ] paradigm, forcing it to rethink all of its foundations—a process that would later prove painful.” Bolton quoted Neff as stating in 1980: “It was the expectation of some that we would simply take the American-style religion and ‘plant it.’ I’m sure there were some who expected that we would take all of the ‘baggage’ of the church here, that is, worship forms, architectural forms, systems and structures; [that we] would take it and impose it.”

Apostle Neff soon came to understand that a message declar-

---

38Bolton, Apostle of the Poor, 35.
39Ibid., 35.
ing all other Christian denominations as in error and literature that only distinguished Community of Christ from those denominations, left Community of Christ with nothing to say in cultures that were not Christian-influenced and where people had little or no knowledge of "denomination" in the first place. He soon realized that what he “had once thought were exclusively ‘Christian values’” were values to which the Japanese already subscribed. He concluded, “The core values of the Bible, such as Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, were universal.”

The Church was beginning to discover that the God in whom it believed, with concrete definitions of who and what God was and was not, and over whom they thought they had a controlling monopoly, was bigger and broader than they had ever imagined. God, through the Holy Spirit, had been at work in places around the world, including other Christian faith communities and also including faith communities outside of Christianity. Neff’s summation about Christian values was only a precursor.

Matthew Bolton observed that the clash between objective and subjective culture was at the root of the challenges to the Church’s status quo:

If all the church had had to deal with was the objective part of East Asian culture, then the church might well have continued as it always had without significant change to its message or attitudes. However, objective culture is merely the tip of the iceberg. It is made up of the manifestations of the far larger and complex subjective culture.

Subjective culture is made up of the collective stories, myths, philosophical assumptions, ethical beliefs, experience, traumas and victories of a people. It evades definition by even the most astute observer and is a powerful motivating force in people’s lives. . . . Neff came to understand that . . . Japanese people were not interested in the differences between [Community of Christ] and Mormons; they were interested in the differences between Christianity and Buddhism, Shintoism or Confucianism. . . . He realized that much of the [Community of Christ] message was aimed at resonating with the American subjective culture and made little sense to someone from Japan.

**Basic Beliefs Committee**

The First Presidency set up a committee in 1960 to explore the

---

40Ibid., 38, 41.
41Ibid., 39–41.
basic beliefs of the Church. Although appointing this committee coincided with emerging challenges in Korea and Japan, it was not specifically a direct response. The changed world and the sense of needing a new understanding were already in place. The task of the committee was more than an academic exercise in theology; rather, it was guided by the spirit of revelation which has always been and continues to be foundational to the Church.\[^{42}\]

Neff’s recitation of the challenges facing the missions in Asia forced a broader definition of the committee’s work, making its task all the more urgent. Neff raised many questions, including these:

1. What is the central message of the gospel? Surely it must be something beyond the differences between the [Community of Christ]\[^{43}\] and other churches. In a non-Christian culture, is it possible to see other Christians more as allies than as adversaries?
2. By winning non-Westerners to an American church that emphasizes ‘Joseph’s land’ and the political, economic, and social values of the United States, how do we help the new converts? What do they or we gain if they become marginalized from their own societies?
3. How useful is the traditional [Community of Christ] accent on ‘the church’ being identified with the United States and the missions abroad being satellites of (i.e., less than) ‘the church’? The need for indigenous ‘juridical persons’ in some nations makes this paternalistic stance irrelevant in the eyes of the Orientals, for example.
4. How can the [Community of Christ] become indigenous to the various cultures of the world? Can appointees from the United States learn to lead from behind, so leaders native to the various cultures can have their rightful leadership roles among their own people?\[^{44}\]

**MISSION AND MESSAGE IN THE EARLY TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

The foundations laid by the Basic Beliefs Committee in the 1960s and the work in Korea, Japan, India and other emerging places during the 1960s and 1970s fostered a new spirit of reflection. Every facet of the Church’s belief, polity, and history was explored. Amid these explorations, Prophet-President W. Wallace Smith brought a revelation to the Church on April 1, 1968. The inspired counsel reads, in part:

Some of you have sought security in the words and phrases by

\[^{42}\]See Doctrine and Covenants, especially from Section 147 onward.

\[^{43}\]The original text has “RLDS Church” throughout, a now-obsolete reference to “Community of Christ.”

\[^{44}\]Howard, _The Church through the Years_, Vol. 2, 359–60.
which the faithful of earlier days have expressed their knowledge of me. My ways are still the ways of my Son. My servants of the holy priesthood will need to be alert as never before to see that my work is not vitiated by the designs of the adversary. They must also bring to their searching for truth and their service to my people all the treasures of understanding I have opened for them elsewhere. It is necessary for all to promote unity so that my blessings can be yours as you willingly bend your strength to kingdom-building enterprises.

My servants of the leading quorums are commended for their diligence in seeking more light and truth from all available sources. For have I not told you that my glory is intelligence and he that seeketh learning by study and by faith will be rewarded in this life and the life to come? Your efforts to find ways to more successfully implement the goals of my church must be continued. (D&C 149:4, 5)

The Basic Beliefs Committee summarized the transformative spirit that was moving through the Church and in the lives of people who were responding to ministry offered by the Church this way: “The real genius of restoration in the founding experience of the church through Joseph Smith was not so much in recapturing a church of the past as it was in renewed and vital prophetic contact with divinity. God is the source of life. It is in him that restoration is found. Since the authority to function as the Church of Jesus Christ rests in divinity, the church, if it is to be true, must in reality respond to the leadership of the Holy Spirit and to the truth of the incarnation revealed in Jesus Christ.”

Advances in the study of Church history from the early 1960s—what many have called the “New Mormon History”—played an important role in how Community of Christ reshaped its understanding of the founding events of the movement. The Church’s unique history and the stories of its people still have a role. In speaking of the Church’s mission and message in India, Apostle Dale E. Luffman stated, “The story of Joseph Smith, Junior, the Book of Mormon, and the history of the church inform our heritage and tra-


dition, but it is not the gospel.”

William D. Russell, professor at Graceland University, wrote: “We have too often based our faith more on Joseph Smith than on Jesus, probably without realizing it. In our attempt to prove that we were the one true church we tended to focus on the Joseph Smith biography: the First Vision, angelic visitations, the Book of Mormon, the organization of the church, authoritative priesthood and sacraments, etc. We focused on Joseph because he was what made us unique among Christian churches, and made us think our church was the true church.”

W. Grant McMurray, as prophet-president of the Church, offered this understanding of “restoration” in 1999:

The church of the past declared that there was more to know and that the gospel was to be restored in fresh and exciting ways. For some, the idea of “restoration” got locked up in a box as if everything that can be known was released in a single moment and now must be mulled over and replicated. But instead, restoration is a spirit, not a form. It is the quickening of one’s heart when one understands that this is a vital age and we are all called into it as emissaries of faith and conveyers of hope. Restoration embraces transformation, for at its heart is change. It says the old things must pass away and new things will be born.

Throughout the last half of the twentieth century, Community of Christ continued its quest for a renewed understanding of its mission and message. There were many efforts toward expressing the message in theologically sound ways, but most of these were from scholars and high-ranking Church leaders. A serendipitous grassroots effort in 2004 brought a refreshing new articulation of the essential message of the restoration movement and the gospel as understood by the Church.

For many years, groups of mostly lay leaders and members from

---

47 Dale E. Luffman, Interviewed by Steven Shields, March 5, 2012. Luffman was the apostle responsible for India, 1994–2002.

48 Graceland University, with campuses in Lamoni, Iowa, and Independence, Missouri, is affiliated with Community of Christ.


every nation of the Church have gathered for a series of training sessions before World Conference. This regular gathering convened at the Temple in Independence in 2004. Although the group was simply asked to provide a report of its gathering, many felt a powerful spirit that resulted in a document expanding several key themes describing the essence of Community of Christ.\(^{51}\)

Titled “We Are One, We Are Many,” the document highlights the importance of community (the cause of Zion), the worth of persons, worship and the sacraments, the scriptures (Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants), mission, peace, justice, and sharing (generosity, tithes and offerings), and the centrality of Jesus Christ.\(^{52}\) When “We Are One, We Are Many” was published, the Church was reminded of the importance of its increasing diversity through inspired counsel given by Prophet-President McMurray on March 29, 2004: “Listen carefully to the many testimonies of those around the world who have been led into the fellowship of the Community of Christ. The richness of cultures, the poetry of language, and the breadth of human experience permit the gospel to be seen with new eyes and grasped with freshness of spirit. That gift has been given to you. Do not fail to understand its power” (D&C 162:4a).

The First Presidency issued a document early in 2009 titled “We Share Identity, Mission, Message, and Beliefs.” The document incorporated much of the passion and key points of “We Are One, We Are Many.”\(^{53}\) The heart of “We Share” is a statement of Enduring Principles: grace and generosity, sacredness of creation, continuing revelation, worth of all persons, all are called, responsible choices, pursuit of peace, unity in diversity, and blessings of community. The Enduring Principles give expression to the essential message of the Church through core values, rather than through doctrinal statements.

The Enduring Principles are foundational to the Church’s mission today and guide the Church in engaging in that mission. The

\(^{51}\)I attended these meetings and was a member of the editorial team that drafted the document.


Apostle Mary Jacks Dynes, left, and Apostle Dale Luffman ordain Susan D. Oxley (formerly Skoor), an apostle in 2005. Her apostolic assignments have included the Western USA, Canada, Australia, French Polynesia, and other parts of the Pacific. Photo by Rachel van Rossum Thorp. Copyright Community of Christ 2012. Used by permission.
First Presidency has described the Enduring Principles as the “DNA” of Community of Christ.\footnote{First Presidency, “We Share,” www.cofchrist.org/evangelist/0110 EE_Schaal1_WeShare.ppt (accessed June 15, 2012).} The Enduring Principles are what members of Community of Christ are “called to be,” which is understood to be a most important facet of discipleship.\footnote{See the “Called to Be” link on the Church’s homepage, www.cofchrist.org (accessed June 15, 2012). See also “We Share Enduring Principles,” in Sharing in Community of Christ, 2d ed., 12–14.}

One Community of Christ leader, Apostle Susan Oxley has suggested that, “while basic beliefs speak to intellect, Enduring Principles speak to the heart.”\footnote{Apostle Susan D. Oxley (formerly Skoor), Sunstone Symposium workshop, Salt Lake City, August 4, 2010, my notes.} James C. Cable, who served as apostle for India during the 1980s and 1990s, describes the Enduring Principles as fitting well with Neff’s philosophy of mission and message.\footnote{James C. Cable (apostle responsible for India, 1982–94), Interviewed by Steven Shields, March 5, 2012.}

For a denomination that operates with different models in different places with sometimes vastly different social needs and cultural context, the Enduring Principles bring unity without forcing uniformity. This approach is foundational to how the Church understands its mission, which is to “proclaim Jesus Christ, and promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace.”\footnote{“Our Mission,” http://www.cofchrist.org/ourfaith/mission.asp (accessed October 27, 2012).} Community of Christ’s mission is not a quest to preserve or reconstruct a presupposed “correct form” from the past, but to learn, in community with other disciples, what it means to love God and to love neighbor as self.

At the heart of the Church’s mission is to invite people to Christ, while at the same time attending to those tasks which Jesus declared as his mission, recorded in Luke 4. This mission includes abolishing poverty, alleviating suffering, and pursuing peace and justice in the world. All of this is done by preparing disciples to serve, with local congregations engaging in mission in their own neighborhoods, towns, and cities.\footnote{“Mission Initiative,” http://www.cofchrist.org/mission/ (accessed October 27, 2012).}

Determining who and what is Community of Christ is based
more on self-identification by members and friends who declare their commitment to Jesus Christ and to the Church’s values rather than on an institutional judgment of what constitutes “right belief” or a “correct pattern.” A traveler in the different lands and cultures where Community of Christ operates will find little uniformity in its buildings, styles of worship, programs, or congregational polity.

Bunda Chibwe, a member of the Council of Twelve Apostles since 2000, said Community of Christ

...is no longer a church focused on exclusiveness stemming from its past difficulties, but rather a worldwide community of disciples, witnesses of Jesus Christ, people called as community builders and committed to peace, reconciliation, and healing of spirit. . . . We have conceptualized what really makes us an authentic . . . church that can interpret and contextualize the entire church’s identity, message, beliefs, and enduring principles in such a way that we blend the values of our African heritage and culture with the strong need to confront cultural habits that do not support the worth of all persons.60

Community of Christ’s evolving approach to mission is guided by the Church’s understanding of the principle of continuing revelation. That “God has yet more light and truth to reveal” suggests that the Church must continue to seek and reinterpret, reshaping its message and refocusing its mission rather than maintaining any particular status quo. This approach is understood as a natural progression of the spirit of restoration that was set in place by the Church’s founding brothers and sisters, beginning with Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon. Those who would be disciples of Jesus Christ must continually challenge old interpretations, preconceived notions, and romanticized ideas of the past and be open to the movement of God wherever and whenever God chooses.

In conclusion, these words of counsel brought to the Church by Prophet-President Stephen M. Veazey in 2010, give confirmation to the need for the Church’s continually evolving efforts to pursue the mission of Jesus Christ in the world today:

Beloved children of the Restoration, your continuing faith adventure with God has been divinely-led, eventful, challenging, and

June 20, 2012).

Stephen M. Veazey was ordained as prophet-president of Community of Christ in 2005. He previously served as a president of seventy and, for several years, in the Council of Twelve Apostles. Copyright Community of Christ 2012. Photo by staff photographer. Used by permission.
sometimes surprising to you. By the grace of God, you are poised to fulfill God’s ultimate vision for the church.

When your willingness to live in sacred community as Christ’s new creation exceeds your natural fear of spiritual and relational transformation, you will become who you are called to be. The rise of Zion the beautiful, the peaceful reign of Christ, awaits your wholehearted response to the call to make and steadfastly hold to God’s covenant of peace in Jesus Christ. (D&C 164:9)
“A NEGRO PREACHER”:  
THE WORLDS OF ELIJAH ABLES

Russell W. Stevenson

Elijah Ables knew how to make an impression. As one of the first African American priesthood holders in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he evoked strong loyalties and rabid hatred. One of his converts, a young mother named Eunice Ross Kinney, remembered him over fifty years after her baptism, in spite of decades of disillusionment and pain: “I know of no person living that I would be so glad to see as him.” He could incite detractors to irrational anger. Both friend and enemy accused him of physical assault, usurpation of authority, alarmism, and murder. As a mixed-blood Mormon, he embodied the racial anxieties that haunted American Mormonism as it sought to define itself within a society

RUSSELL W. STEVENSON (russellwades@gmail.com) is an instructor at Salt Lake Community College. He received his M.A. from the University of Kentucky in 2009.

1The spelling of Elijah Ables’s name is unclear from the historical record. In his own writings, he spells his name both as “Ables” and “Able.” Elijah Ables, Letter to Brigham Young, March 14, 1854, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Reel 32; Receipt of payment, June 28, 1858, Brigham Young Office Files, Reel 36, respectively. Similarly, a news article, “Local and Other Matters,” Deseret News, October 6, 1869, 1, spelled it as both “Ables” and “Able.” He likely dropped the “s” in the second rendering; therefore, I have chosen to use “Ables.”

2Eunice Ross Kinney, Letter to Wingfield Watson, July 5, 1885, MSS 3102, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Other Kinney-Watson letters cited by date.
dominated by white Protestants. Hunted by mobs, criticized by fellow Mormons, and denied temple privileges by two priesthood leaders, Ables seldom received the welcoming hand of fellowship.

But Ables did not leave. He accommodated, waited, and occasionally pushed back. He ignored the snipings of critics, extended his hand to Mormonism’s avowed enemies, and helped a large body of Saints escape from a war zone. He was never driven out of Kirtland, Missouri, or Nauvoo. Ables’s was a pilgrim’s faith: wandering, pioneering, and unpredictable. Ables represented his faith most poignantly when he was on his own.

**Elijah Ables and Collective Memory**

In the discourse of the Mormon scholarly community, Elijah
Ables has served as a symbolic figure for Mormonism’s struggles with racism. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs writes in his foundational work, *On Collective Memory*: “Society tends to erase in its memory everything that might separate individuals or that might distance groups from each other.” The remembering or forgetting of symbolic figures such as Ables often is a “rational activity that takes its point of departure in the conditions in which the society at the moment finds itself, in other words, the present.” Ables’s sheer existence has provoked controversy, built faith, inflamed anger, and even prompted departure from the faith.

The Latter-day Saints have a long tradition of lifting “voice[s] from the dust.” In the Book of Mormon, “one Samuel, a Lamanite” (Hel. 12:2) probably converted during a recent Nephite proselytizing mission, entered the affluent Nephite city of Zarahemla to prophesy the coming of Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly disgusted at the pretentiousness of this “cursed” Lamanite, the Nephites rejected him. Insistent on declaring his message, Samuel stood on the city wall to shout his message that the Nephites themselves were “cursed because of your riches” (Hel. 13:21). He listed the signs that would foretell Christ’s coming and warned the Nephites to repent. Consumed by materialism and pride, the Nephites attempted to kill him, but he escaped and disappeared from the narrative. At Samuel’s first appearance, Mormon refers to him as Samuel “a Lamanite” (Hel. 13:2). By the time Samuel leaves the city, he has become known as “Samuel, the Lamanite” (Hel. 16:1; emphasis mine).

Samuel’s brief encounter with the Nephites would probably have been fleeting within the Nephite annals except that his prophetic warnings were fulfilled by the immense destruction accompanying the visitation of the resurrected Jesus. The Lord blessed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and taught them the proper order of baptism. He also asked to examine their written record. Something was missing. Jesus asked the Nephite archivists why they had not included the teachings of “Samuel the Lamanite” (3 Ne. 23:9–13). Shocked at their own oversight, they scrambled to correct the error.4

Since the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saint historians have been making a similar effort to give voice to one of the first black

---


4Many thanks to Max Perry Mueller for this thoughtful insight.
priesthood holders. In 1839, Parley P. Pratt wrote that “one dozen free negroes or mulattoes never have belonged to our society in any part of the world, from its first organization to this date.” Ables was an outlier, strange even for his own time. Pratt wanted outsiders to see the Church as a church by white men for white men, contrary to rumors circulating about the Saints’ friendliness to blacks. Ables’s own contemporaries probably realized what an unusual place he held in their history books.

**YOUNG ELIJAH**

It is not clear whether Ables was born free or as a slave. Virtually no information exists concerning his life before joining the Mormons; the little documentation available comes from later records. He was probably born between 1808 and 1812 in northern Maryland, a region that was becoming increasingly prosperous for white planta-

---


6Parley P. Pratt, *Late Persecution of the Church of Jesus Christ, of Latter-day Saints; Ten Thousand American Citizens Robbed, Plundered, and Banished; Others Imprisoned, and Others Martyred for their Religion. With a Sketch of Their Rise, Progress and Doctrine* (New York: J. W. Harrison, 1840), 28.
In 1836, Joseph Smith Sr. gave Elijah a patriarchal blessing in which he declared Elijah to be “an orphan, for thy father, hath never done his duty toward thee.” Ables’s status as an “orphan” probably had little to do with his lineage; it was a commentary on Elijah’s relationship with his own white father. It is noteworthy that Ables never performed proxy temple ordinances on behalf of his father, though he did perform them for both his mother and daughter. Elijah’s father had probably impregnated Elijah’s mother and then abandoned her, an unfortunate storyline for thousands of black women in antebellum America.

During the early years of Ables’s childhood, the Marylander plantation owners were “basking in the sunshine of good times” that the European wars gave them. But by 1820, both crop markets and rural credit confidence had begun to decline. The poor markets led slave owners to seek for ways to decrease expenditures—primarily by selling slaves southward. Between 1819 and 1829, Frederick County—one of the candidates for Elijah’s birthplace—lost 952 slaves to interstate slave traffic.

By 1823, northern Marylanders noticed that in “Frederick,

---


8H. Michael Marquardt, ed., Early Patriarchal Blessings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2007), 99.


Washington, and Alleghany... there are but few slaves.”11 In 1831, an agent for the Maryland Colonization society noted that “all classes of blacks in this county [Washington] are diminishing in number & their place is filling up with an industrious white population.”12 Whatever Ables’s status, the black population of northern Maryland was becoming increasingly rare.

Whether as a runaway slave or a free man, Ables probably left the area as a young man at the same time as the general exodus from Maryland. Strict fugitive slave laws made direct travel westward through Virginia risky. The Ohio Black Law of 1804 required that black migrants provide a certificate of manumission and prohibited assistance to any fugitive slave.13 It would have been safer to travel to Pennsylvania where state laws aggressively protected runaway slaves.14

The first documentation we have of Ables’s existence is when

11Ibid., 118.
12Ibid., 106.
Ezekiel Roberts, a young father of two from the Cincinnati area, baptized him in 1832.15 Little is known of Roberts’s identity or family. Roberts appears on the Nauvoo tax records in 1842; no contemporary documentation speaks to his existence after that.16

**ELIJAH ABLES AS “MULATTO”**

According to the 1850 census, Elijah Ables was a quadroon—one

---


quarter African.\textsuperscript{17} John Taylor later identified Ables as an “octo-roon,” meaning that he was one-eighth black.\textsuperscript{18} As the child of an interracial couple, Ables represented the awkward reality of racial intermingling in antebellum America.

In 1774, Edward Long’s \textit{The History of Jamaica} would claim that “the White and the Negro are two different species” and that the “mulatto” was “of the mule-kind.” Long thus believed they were “not so capable of producing from one another as from a commerce with a distinct White or Black.”\textsuperscript{19} “Mulatto” derived from the word “mule,” referring to its genetic hybridity. The scientific community had generally agreed that African Americans and Anglo-Saxons were separate species.

Most scientists had also agreed that mulattos were less capable of reproducing.\textsuperscript{20} Scottish physician Dr. Robert Knox used the mulatto sterility theory to promote miscegenation. Race, Knox argued, “is


\textsuperscript{18}Quorum of the Twelve Minutes, June 4, 1879, George Albert Smith Family Collection, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.


everything. . . . [I]n a word, civilization depend[s] on it.”21 Knox maintained that any mulatto race could not “live beyond the third or fourth generation by mulattoes merely. They must intermarry with the pure race or perish.”22 Long and Knox both believed that a mulatto needed a white sexual partner to reproduce properly.

In 1843, physician Josiah Nott turned their argument on its head. Nott agreed that the mulatto “is the offspring of two distinct species—as the mule from the horse and the ass.”23 But whites could not eradicate mulatto sterility; mulattos would only degenerate white virility. Intermarriage would lead to the “probable extermination of the two races.”24 Nott later pushed for the federal government to collect census data on mulattos to demonstrate that mulattos had shorter lifespans and a decreased quality of life.25 The mulatto, Nott argued, “is a degenerate, unnatural offspring, doomed by nature to work out its own destruction.”26 Renowned scholar Louis Agassiz described mulattos in even more grotesque terms: “A class of men in which pure type fades away as completely as do all the good qualities, physical and moral, of the primitive races, engendering a mongrel crowd as repulsive as mongrel dogs, which are apt to be their companions.”27

The Cleveland Advertiser agreed, declaring that “a higher power than any human Legislature . . . had forbidden the practice of amalgamation. Nature has set her indelible seal upon the contrast between the features and characteristics of the white and the African.”

---

23 Ibid., 254.
24 Josiah Nott, “The Mulatto a Hybrid—Probable Extermination of the Two Races If the Whites and Blacks Are Allowed to Intermarry,” The American Journal of the Medical Sciences 6 (July 1843): 252–57.
The Advertiser’s editorial board argued that the few proponents of miscegenation ought to petition “[nature] to alter her decrees and when she does alter them, and not until then will their wishes be accomplished.”

Interracial unions were considered a public spectacle, curiosity, and even moral outrage. In most states, they were also illegal, punishable by prison time. In 1839, in Hagerstown, Maryland, an African American man was alleged to have had sexual intercourse with a young white woman. The local magistrate ordered him to be imprisoned, but a mob forced the authorities to surrender the man, whipped him, and had him permanently expelled from the city. During the 1836 presidential election, vice presidential candidate Richard Johnson came under intense criticism for siring two children with one of his female slaves. Contemporaries saw his sin less in the conduct per se—it was commonplace for white slave owners to take sexual liberties with their female slaves—but rather “in the publicity


and barefacedness of his conduct.”  

The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society sought the abolition of slavery partly because of the sexual acts of southern slaveholders with their female slaves. They knew they must “prevent the amalgamation now going on, so far as can be done, by protecting one million of the females of this country under the protection of law.” In 1821, the Massachusetts state legislature considered stemming black immigration for they were “a species of population . . . both injurious and burdensome” to “civilized society.” Freed slaves were a “degraded” lot, given to “idleness” and “debauchery.”  

The otherwise liberal reformer Thomas L. Kane agreed, believing himself to be in line with the latest scientific thought. “The loathsome process of Amalgamation” had created a class of “family paupers, half witted and mischievous persons . . . a few heretics and rebels, and offenders against the law; but more than anything else, in-


corrigible thieves.” The fate of the white race would be “a signal and disastrous deterioration.” Kane preferred that “his name should die out forever” rather than his children “ally themselves with individuals having the slightest taint” of African ancestry.35

Now a member of the Church, Ables experienced little of this backlash. In Kirtland, Ables received his ritual washings and anointings.36 Zebedee Coltrin, who administered them, later announced that he did so only at Joseph’s express direction for “while I had my hands upon his head, I never had such unpleasant feelings in my life.” Coltrin vowed he would “never again anoint another person who had Negro blood in him, unless I was commanded by the Prophet to do so.” In spring 1836, Ables was ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood. That June, the Messenger and Advocate reported that Ables’s name was entered on Church record books as an elder.38 By December, Ables was listed as a member of the Seventy and one “of the Elders who covenant to keep the Word of Wisdom.”39 Zebedee Coltrin later recalled that Joseph instructed missionaries that blacks “were not entitled to the Priesthood, nor yet to be baptized without the consent of their masters,” suggesting that Ables had arrived in Ohio a free man, either through birth, redemption, or escape.40 Having the priesthood empowered Elijah; in his old age, he told President John Taylor that he hoped to be “the welding link between the black and white races”—language he almost certainly borrowed from one of Joseph Smith’s revelations (LDS D&C 128:18). He would be “the initia-
tive authority by which his race should be redeemed.”

“BLACK MORMONS”

In fall 1830, Joseph called four Mormon elders on a mission to western Missouri to preach to the native American tribes. This cue came from the recently published Book of Mormon that told the story of a Jewish family that had come to the Americas more than 2,500 years earlier. The family had broken apart, with the righteous being called Nephites after their leader, Nephi. The wicked branch of the family took the name of Nephi’s brother, Laman. The Nephites settled in the highlands while the Lamanites settled in the lowlands. The text was written from the perspective of the “righteous” family branch and often described the wicked in racialized terms: darkened skin, degenerate customs, and vicious lifestyles. The Saints accepted the native tribes’ Lamanite identity as self-evident. Whatever their sins, however, the Saints believed that Native Americans were descendants of chosen Israel and should be gathered into the fold.

The elders preached through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. When they arrived in Missouri, they taught the Delaware tribe, then exiled from their homeland by the federal government. Oliver Cowdery wrote Joseph of their success: “The principle chief says he believes every word of the Book [of Mormon] & there are many more in the Nation who believes.” Their congregations in Missouri were racially diverse, including “a respectable number of Negros.” In June 1831, Joseph himself traveled to Missouri and announced a revelation designating Jackson County to be the “land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion.” His plans included a complicated network of temples. Joseph came to see Jackson County as a “goodly land of

41John Taylor, quoted in Council Meeting, Minutes, August 26, 1908, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Box 78, fd. 7.


44D&C 54:8, 101:70–71. See also Richard Lyman Bushman, Joseph
the heritage of the children of God.”45 As the Saints flowed into Missouri, a slave state, their Yankee sentiments jarred the locals.

Making matters worse, W. W. Phelps, editor of the Mormon paper in Independence, Missouri, flaunted the Mormons’ status as a chosen people: “When we consider that the land of Missouri is the land where the saints of the living God are to be gathered together and sanctified for the second coming of the Lord Jesus, we cannot help exclaiming with the prophet, O land be glad! and O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord: For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.”46 Phelps maintained that the Lord gave the land to the native tribes as well: “The Lord . . . declares [Missouri] to be the land of Zion, which is the land of Joseph.”47

Phelps had previously published an abolitionist paper in upstate New York and had harshly criticized “the West India Negro whip” as “most appalling.” Throughout summer 1833, he developed an obsession with slavery, probably because he learned in December 1832 about Joseph Smith’s prophecy of a coming civil war over it.48 Joseph Smith urged that “great care should be taken on this point.” Nevertheless, the Saints should thank God that “much is doing towards abolishing slavery.”49 As to the Mormon attitude on race, Phelps counseled moderation: “So long as we have no special rule in the church, as to

---

45Manuscript History of the Church, A–1, 137.
48Mark Lyman Staker, Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 179–82.
people of color, let prudence guide.”

The Saints’ millennial rhetoric, their opposition to slavery, and Phelps’s willingness to wink at racial integration sent the Missourians into a rage. The Mormons were social radicals seeking to bring “free Negroes & Mulattoes from other States to become Mormons and remove and settle among us.” Phelps’s moderate stance on free blacks revealed Mormonism’s “more odious colors.” Missourians feared that “the introduction of such a cast [sic]” would “corrupt our blacks & instigate them to bloodshed.” Most outrageous of all, the Mormons would introduce “degraded and corrupted free negroes and mulattoes” as “fit companions for our wives and daughters.”

It was only a matter of time before the Mormons would invite “the free brethren of color in Illinois, to come up . . . to the land of Zion.” The Saints were “coniving . . . with the Indians, and stirring up the negroes to rebel against their masters.” Writers pointed out that “the welcome reception” Mormons gave to “free blacks, and of course to runaway slaves,”


made the Mormons’ presence “particularly obnoxious.” 55 That Phelps openly promoted the “marvelous . . . gathering of the Indians” to Jackson County did not help. 56

Phelps retorted that Missourians were all too willing to “set their Afric colored population to steal into the dwellings of peaceable neighbors and defile the virtuous! They said, ‘We will ravish your women!’” 57 One of the mobs threatened to “let their negroes loose to go through [the] plantations and lay open [the] fields for the destruction of [the] crops.” 58 Both parties saw the black community primarily as a weapon of war.

In July 1833, a committee of concerned Missouri residents demanded that “forthwith every Mormon must leave the County.” 59 Vigilantes forced them at gunpoint into neighboring Clay County, turning the Mormon people from a community of up-and-coming utopians into refugees. 60 The impoverished Saints, one reporter observed, had “reached the low conditions of the black population.” 61 The victims “are in hopes that we shall be able to return to our houses

58Manuscript History of the Church, A–1, 350.
60Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling, 222–30.
& lands,” one man wrote, “but how this is to be accomplished is all in the dark to us.” One unidentified Mormon sent a letter of wishful thinking to Joseph Smith, claiming that it was only “with difficulty that the Indians were restrained” from exacting vengeance on behalf of the Saints.62

The stereotype extended well beyond the borders of Missouri. In New York, a racially integrated group of antislavery activists was called “the Black Mormons of the East.” The spectacle was “clearly intended to outrage public taste and feeling.”63 One newspaper classed the Mormons with those “fanatics” who insisted on the “immediate ABOLITION OF SLAVERY.”64

Having driven out the “black Mormons,” the Missouri State Legislature took further action to define its racial boundaries. In 1835, it passed a law stating that “no free negro or mulatto, other than a citizen of some one of the United States, shall be permitted to reside within this state, unless he shall obtain license or otherwise acquire a right to reside within the state, according to the provisions of this act.”65

By the summer of 1836, Clay County residents informed the Mormons that the time had come for them to move on. In December,


64“Mr. Clay and Abolition,” Enquirer [Richmond], August 23,1839, 2, http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/newspapers/doc/v2:102C8DD28756FF70@GBNEWS-12DA039164F28EA0-12D8B97B0F0C10E8-1308A0A5348D3C7B (accessed August 14, 2012).

65“An Act Concerning Free Negroes and Mulattos,” Daily Commercial Bulletin (St. Louis), October 30,1835, 2, http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/newspapers/doc/v2:11ESC7580529F8A@GBNEWS-11F36935140492A0-11F369354B560B0-11F36935B37A2D48 (accessed August 5, 2012). The requirements for obtaining a license were so strict that very few could ever hope to qualify. The law also delegated the right of determining eligibility to the county courts, who took a significantly more lenient approach. At least one court gave licenses to persons of “good moral character . . . who were able to
the Missouri State Legislature created Caldwell County in northern Missouri, designated for the Saints’ settlement, in hopes that it would keep the Mormons at arm’s length. Its major town, Far West, rapidly became the largest settlement north of the Missouri River, especially after Joseph Smith permanently relocated there in the spring of 1838. To assuage the concerns of both the Missourians and the public, the Church newspaper dedicated an entire issue to the denunciation of abolitionism. “The curse is not yet taken off the sons of Canaan,” Joseph editorialized, and “neither will be until it is affected by as great a power as caused it to come.” The people who “interfere the least with the decrees and purposes of God in this matter, will come under the least condemnation before him. . . . God can do his own work without the aid of those who are not dictated by his counsel.” In 1838, he stated the Mormon position more flatly: “We do not believe in setting the Negroes free.”

MORMONS AND AFRICAN COLONIZATION

How could Joseph accommodate both Mormonism’s proselytizing impulse and the reality that too much zeal would marginalize the Saints as despised abolitionists? W. W. Phelps wrote a hopeful hymn about Mormonism’s spread through “Afric’s black legions” and “sultry plains.” Most progressive northerners saw repatriation to Africa (Liberia being the best-known colonization site) as the most humane and practicable option. Leading abolitionist William
Lloyd Garrison opposed colonization, but he was exceptional. The leading voice for this movement was the American Colonization Society. A Virginia chapter declared that the movement would appeal to “the warmest sympathies of humanity, to the broadest and most comprehensive principles of philanthropy, as well as to the most enlightened views of public policy.” Colonization would “elevate the character and improve the prospects of the free colored population of the United States” and “encourage emancipation in a manner consistent with the happiness of the country.” Reverend R. J. Breckenridge declared before the society’s Kentucky chapter that colonization would relieve the United States “of the curse of slavery in a manner, cheap, certain, and advantageous to both parties.” Henry Clay declared before the same society that Africans and whites were “incongruous elements of population,” kept sepa-
rate by “invincible prejudices and by natural causes.”73

Colonization advocates saw themselves as humane: “If ever the vast continent [Africa] is to experience the blessings of civilization, it must be through the medium of foreign benevolence.”74 Colonizers boosted several locales as more suitable to the Africans than the United States: West Africa, Brazil, and India.75 Inspired by the colonization movement, Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer hoped reformers would “induce or compel” young African Americans to be sent to Haiti, as they were living “in idleness and poverty” in Boston.76 Boyer commended “those generous men” who were “preparing for the unfortunate persons who were its objects, an asylum where their existence would be supportable.”77

Southerners saw colonization as an effective way to preserve racial purity. Colonization, an Atlanta paper reported, would “protect the blood of . . . posterity from the responsibility of contamination by amalgamation with the negro race.”78 As the Mormons were being expelled from DeWitt County in August 1838, Missourians were also applauding Mississippi boosters for raising $14,000 dollars to assist in


the forcible deportation of free blacks.\textsuperscript{79}

Leading Saints expressed consistent support for colonizing programs. In 1833, Joseph Smith called the colonization efforts a "wonderful event."\textsuperscript{80} In a special issue of the \textit{Messenger and Advocate}, editor John Whitmer intensified the rhetoric. He had no difficulty with abolitionists purchasing the slaves to set them at liberty, "provided they would place them upon some other continent than ours."\textsuperscript{81} If slaves were to be emancipated, then the South would be "overrun with paupers, and a reckless mass of human beings, uncultivated, untaught, and unaccustomed to provide for themselves." Worse still, it would endanger "the chastity of every female who might be found in our streets." Even if colonization were "folly," interracial unions would be a "devilish" outcome—and "insensible to feeling must be the mind, that would consent for a moment, to see his fair daughter, his sister, or perhaps, his bosom companion, in the embrace of a NEGRO!"\textsuperscript{82}

Joseph was oriented toward collective societies of believers, as witnessed by his experiments in Christian communalism.\textsuperscript{83} His Missouri colonization program foresaw the Saints spreading across the


\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 300.

frontier in congregations with Independence serving as its center (LDS D&C 101:20–21). In September 1837, Joseph addressed a conference of elders “on the subject of the gathering of the Saints in the last days,” noting that the “places appointed for the gathering of the Saints were at this time crowded to overflowing.” More stakes would be necessary “in order that the poor might have a place to gather to.”84 Joseph directed one immigration leader: “All the Saints should gather as soon as possible, urge all the saints to gather immediately if they possibly can.”85

The charges that Mormon gathering included blacks placed them in an impossible position. How could Joseph accommodate both Mormonism’s proselytizing impulse and practical realities that positioned them as friends of “debauched” slaves and Indians? Even if the Mormons opposed slavery, they could not afford to be portrayed as abolitionists. Illinois abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy had seen his press repeatedly destroyed by pro-slavery mobs. In November 1837, he was murdered, allegedly for attempting to establish an abolitionist paper in St. Louis.86 In 1838 Clay County election officials told Mormons they “were not allowed to vote in Clay County, no more than the

damned negroes." The Mormons were channeling southerners’ racial nightmares—religious zealots committed to handing civilization over to savages and beasts. This environment was neither legal nor safe for men such as Elijah Ables.

The Mormon gathering in Missouri ended abruptly and violently. Throughout the fall of 1838, mobs and Mormons skirmished in Caldwell, Daviess, and Clay counties. To appease the Missourians, Governor Lilburn W. Boggs ordered the Mormons to be removed from the state or be exterminated, a decision that brought severe censure from the Missouri State Legislature—but too late to repair the situation. During the winter of 1838–39, Mormons plodded eastward toward temporary refuge in Quincy, Illinois, while Joseph Smith and his confidants were shivering in Liberty Jail, awaiting trial and possible execution.

**THE CHURCH IN UPPER CANADA**

Meanwhile, Elijah Ables was serving a mission in Canada. In 1791, the British government had divided eastern Canada into two provinces: Upper and Lower Canada. Upper Canada enjoyed a massive upsurge in emigration from England, amounting to a “mania” in the early 1830s. In 1830, Joseph Smith and other Church leaders visited Upper Canada to find a publisher for the Book of Mormon in


---


York (later named Toronto)\textsuperscript{90} in accordance with revelation.\textsuperscript{91} The revelation had not guaranteed success, and they returned home empty-handed; but Joseph’s interest in spreading the gospel to Canada had been piqued. In October 1833, Joseph traveled with Sidney Rigdon and Freeman Nickerson to Mount Pleasant, Upper Canada (now Ontario) to visit Nickerson’s sons, Moses and Eleazor. Both Nickerson brothers converted and formed a small branch in the region. Later that year, Moses Nickerson urged Rigdon to send “a couple preachers” as soon as possible. “Send those you have confidence in or none,” Moses directed. “The work requires competent workmen; for the harvest is truly great.”\textsuperscript{92}

In 1836, Parley P. Pratt and Orson Hyde served a mission to Toronto, converted many members of a religious study group directed by British émigré John Taylor, and established a branch. Pratt left the area exulting: “Truth had now triumphed in Canada.”\textsuperscript{93}


\textsuperscript{93}Parley P. Pratt Jr., ed., \textit{The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Embracing the Life, Ministry, and Travels with Extracts, in Prose and Verse from His Miscella-
tasy following the failure of the Kirtland Safety Society. What made the deepest impression on Taylor, however, was the “firmness, faith, integrity and joy” of the Saints. He felt assured that the Church would succeed.

Both American and British observers held up Ontario as a resplendent mirror of what the “civilized” African could be. In 1829, a group of blacks emigrated from Cincinnati to Ontario, hoping to establish an economically independent refugee community, free from Ohio’s onerous black laws. While many Ontario residents were not free of racial prejudice, life was significantly better for blacks in Ontario. One former slave declared: “Liberty I find to be sweet indeed.” Another former slave, William Grose, implored the slaves in America: “I hope you will all come to Canada as soon as possible.” He had seen Upper Canada and “found the coloured people keeping stores, farming... and doing well.”

By the late 1830s, western Ontario had been serving as the terminus for the Underground Railroad for more than fifteen years. Abolitionists in the United States effused over Canada and its black popula-


99Ibid., 87.

100See Fred Landon, “Amherstburg, Terminus of the Underground
tion. William Lloyd Garrison praised it: “Is there a more moral, orderly, respectful population than the colored population in Toronto?” Boosters called Ontario “freedom’s colony.” Observers noticed that “those who come to Canada (although chiefly runaway slaves) manifest generally a great desire to learn to read and write.”\(^{101}\) By 1838, there were over 10,000 fugitive slaves in Ontario. In contrast, the American Colonization Society had managed to send only 3,000 to Liberia.\(^{102}\) The counties of Essex and Kent teemed with runaways. One observer penned: “The fugitives are as thick as blackbirds in a cornfield.”\(^{103}\)

Throughout Upper Canada, government officials gave land freely to black refugees. In Canadian Niagara, Africans worked as guides and waiters for the stream of tourists coming to see the famous waterfall.\(^{104}\) The Ontario government generally refused to grant U.S. extradition requests for runaway slaves.\(^{105}\) On one rare occasion when the Canadian government complied with an extradition request, nearly 400 African men attacked the American militia escorting a fugitive slave toward the border.\(^{106}\)

One of the earliest black churches, the African Baptist Church,


\(^{103}\)Drew and Clarke, *The Refugee*, 234.


\(^{105}\)Barrington Walker, *Race on Trial: Black Defendants in Ontario’s Criminal Courts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 34.

\(^{106}\)For a full treatment of this incident, see David Murray, *Colonial Justice: Justice, Morality, and Crime in the Niagara District, 1791–1843* (Toronto:
was formed in 1821 in the rural bush settlements near Guelph. Led by fugitive slave William Winks, it served an important social function, helping blacks maintain social cohesion and independence. In the settlement of Wilberforce, the African Baptist Church served as a magnet site for American free blacks looking for refuge from discrimination in the United States. White evangelists—fresh from their abolitionist campaign—began to target the newly emancipated African communities in Ontario. These churches provided the social network necessary to keep the charity of white evangelizing missionaries at arm’s length.

ELIJAH ABLES AS MISSIONARY

Neither the Kirtland High Council minute book nor the general Church minutes in the fall of 1837 and the spring of 1838 record Ables receiving his missionary calling, although it records the assignments for others such as Phineas Richards and David W. Patten. Yet Ables’s obituary states that he “labored successfully in Canada,” and a local farmer wrote his mother that he had noticed a Mormon “negro who was about here” in the spring of 1838.

Joseph Smith’s reason for calling Ables on a low-profile mission can only be conjectured. However, given Joseph Smith’s propensity and support for colonization, the political climate in Missouri, and the reputation the Saints had acquired as friends of the black population, I hypothesize that Smith might have sent Ables to Ontario to qui-

University of Toronto Press, 2003), 196–216.


108Ibid.


111John Broeffle, Letter to Catherine Beckstead, September 17, 1838, MS 2463, LDS Church History Library.
etly determine the possibilities of establishing a black congregation
in an area friendly to African Americans. Clearly, Joseph wanted to
avoid engaging the slavery question, lest he further antagonize the
tensions in Missouri, which would explode into the Mormon War that
fall. Teaching the African refugees in Ontario would facilitate Jo-
seph’s vision of teaching “all the families of the earth” and “Afric’s
black legions” while avoiding the political controversies surrounding
slavery in the United States. Ontario as a haven for blacks would have
held considerable appeal for Joseph as he sought a solution for the di-
lemma that Missouri presented.112*

Like previous missionaries in Canada, Ables probably met with
Church leaders such as John Taylor, John E. Page, and James Blakes-
lee along the way.113* Ables seemed to prefer the smaller towns of up-
state New York and southern Ontario as preaching venues. He can be
definitively located in three areas during his mission: Williamsburg,
Ontario; Madrid, New York; and “up Lake Ontario”—a lake that “wid-
ened so much, that land was scarcely perceptible.”114* Given the higher
elevation of Upper Canada, “up” refers to the southwesterly direc-
tion of the steamships traveling from Kingston to Toronto, suggesting
that Ables traveled westward—probably on the Ottawa-Rideau canal—
on at least one occasion.

Ables’s preaching style was distinctive, even if unpolished. On
two separate occasions, Eunice Kinney pointed out Ables’s lack of ed-
ucation. But as he struggled to read the text in a public sermon,
Eunice Kinney recalls that “the Spirit rested upon him and he preach-
ed a most powerful sermon. It was such a Gospel sermon as I had
never heard before, and I felt in my heart that he was one of God’s
chosen ministers.”115* *

In April 1838, a young Wesleyan Methodist named Zenas Gur-
ley joined the Church and received the Melchizedek Priesthood in

112Murray, Colonial Justice, 11–22.
113Wilford Woodruff et al. to Joseph Smith, September 18, 1837, El-
114James Logan, Notes of a Journey through Canada, the United States,
and the West Indies (Edinburgh: Fraser and Co., 1838).
115Eunice Kinney, Letter to Wingfield Watson, September [n.d.]
1891, Perry Special Collections; see also Kinney to Watson, July 5, 1885.
June. One member recalls that Gurley was “anxious to gather with the Church” but faced grinding poverty. According to Gurley’s son, E. H. Gurley, Zenas was converted after hearing Elder James Blakeslee preach. Gurley was “absorbed by the wonderful but glorious news of communication being once more opened between the heavens and the earth.” While no evidence exists that Ables joined Blakeslee in teaching Gurley, it is certain that Ables became acquainted with Gurley at this time. John Broeffle, a local resident and nephew of Alexander Beckstead, one of the leading Mormons in the region, records that Ables and Gurley ordained Captain William Riley of Williamsburg in spring 1838. Ables also taught and baptized Eunice Ross (later Kinney), then pregnant with her second child.

Ables’s approach rankled some of his missionary associates. Convinced that he could be the “welding link” between the races,
Ables felt comfortable speaking with white men on terms of equality. In June 1839, many of Ables’s missionary associates, most of them also Seventies, complained at a quorum meeting in Quincy about Ables’s alleged behavior.  

His primary errors were threefold: (1) He claimed “that an elder was a High Priest and he had as much authority as any H[igh] P[riest]”; (2) he taught “that there would be stakes of Zion in all the world”; and (3) “he commanded some of the brethren from Canada to flee from there by such a time saying that if they did not cross the river St. Lawrence then they could not get into the States.” One associate, Christopher Merkeley, also accused Ables of “threatening to [knock him] down . . . on their passage up Lake On-

---


122The minutes list Elder Zenas H. Gurley, Moses Smith, the Beckstead brothers (John and George), Robert Burton, and Zebedee Coltrin as the testators. John Broeffle confirms the presence of the Becksteads and Gurley. Broeffle to Beckstead, September 17, 1838. See also Bush, “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” 52 note 33. Gurley was ordained a Seventy after arriving at Far West in the summer of 1838. History of the RLDS Church, 3:743.
Joseph had escaped from Missouri only two months earlier, and the refugee Saints were struggling to establish their new city, Nauvoo, on the Mississippi River. He was likely in no mood to take action that did not help solve the immediate crises of food and shelter for his people.

The proceedings constitute crucial evidence for understanding the nature of Ables’s missionary labors in Canada and upstate New York. The first complaint addresses the distinctions within the Melchizedek Priesthood between elders and high priests. Joseph saw the authority to govern the Church as divisible into two governing orders: the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood. The Aaronic Priesthood was to govern temporal matters and consisted of the offices of deacon, teacher, and priest. The Melchizedek Priesthood consisted of elders, seventies, and high priests, all of whom were commissioned to administer in spiritual things. Elders, Joseph maintained, “have a right to officiate in all these offices of the church when there are no higher authorities present.” Ables likely assumed that, since elders, seventies, and high priests held the Melchizedek Priesthood, they must of necessity be equal in authority. In April 1837, Joseph emphasized that elders, seventies, and high priests were members of the “same Melchisedec Priesthood” but had drawn a clear distinction between the offices by the time Elijah left for Canada.

The second accusation (numerous stakes) countered the missionary message that conversion required gathering to Zion (then Missouri). According to John Broeuffle, some Canadian Saints believed the Second Coming would be in 1847; but even without a specific year, they understood that they must flee from “Babylon” and “go there [to Zion] immediately if possible: . . . They think that Christ will in person reign on the earth there, that all the old prophets will rise with all other dead Christians and be there and beget sons and daughters during a thousand years.” If wives joined without their hus-

---

123 Seventies Minutes, June 1, 1839, “Items of History Pertaining to First Seven Presidents of Seventy,” LDS Church History Library, quoted in Bush, “Mormonism’s Negro Doctrine: An Historical Overview,” 52 note 33.

124 Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling, 157–60, 253–60, for a discussion of the evolution of the priesthood in Joseph Smith’s thought.

bands, they could stay in Canada because “angels will come at the commencement of the millennium... and fetch them alive to their Zion.” Nearly sixty Saints left the region in June 1838. The largest contingent of the exodus was the extended family of Broffle’s uncle, Alexander Beckstead, amounting to “forty some odd of men, women, and children.” By the time the exodus was completed that fall, “but few of the society [were] left.”

Throughout 1838, other congregations were making their way to Zion with the same sense of urgency. In Maine, Wilford Woodruff “advis[ed] the Saints of God to go... to Zion as soon as they can.”

Ables accepted the doctrine of gathering as much as Gurley or Blakeslee. He told his new convert, Eunice, that she should move to be near other Saints; being a lone Saint was not realistic in the frontiers of Canada: “He said that there was a good branch of Saints about forty miles west and we had better go there,” she recalled in a letter to Wingfield Watson. “As we were the only ones that obeyed the gospel in the place, he thought it would be hard for us to live our religion alone. So we done as he advised us and it proved a great blessing to us.”

Although Missouri was the gathering place for the Saints, it was hostile territory for men like Ables. While Joseph felt bound to steer clear of teaching slaves, his vision for the new Mormon empire was broad enough to include a place for African refugees, even though fugitive slaves would never be at ease in Missouri. Ables’s associates among the Seventies were understandably puzzled at what appeared to be a defiance of what they thought had been a crystal-clear prophetic directive.

**CIVIL CONFLICT IN CANADA**

The third complaint appears to contradict the second. If Ables

---

126 Broffle to Beckstead, September 17, 1838.


128 Kinney to Watson, September 1891.
was telling the Saints that there would be stakes throughout the world—a vision he obviously shared with Joseph Smith—then why was he also telling them to leave Canada so quickly? The preceding two decades had been hard for Lower Canada. Whereas most of Lower Canada held on to antiquated modes of subsistence peasant farming, Upper Canada was embracing the wage-labor system to increase output. Between 1815 and 1833, the number of homes in Upper Canada grew from eight to 300. Steamships enabled Upper Canadians to export their agricultural excess, illustrating the “rapid progress of [their] agricultural development.”

John Broeﬄe noticed that the Mormons were actively seeking out the wealthy among the Williamsburg community; that there were significant cash resources at all indicates the integration of Upper Canada into the global market.

The agrarian British faced divided loyalties. Between the fall of 1837 and December 1838, the French in Lower Canada attempted to shake off the intensifying British influence. The British cracked down on the revolt, suspended the Constitution, and demanded oaths of allegiance to the British crown from all Lower Canadian residents. Inspired by the Quebec revolutionaries, Upper Canadian reformer and former Parliamentarian William Mackenzie mounted a similar revolutionary force to rid Canada of the intrigues of the “Family Compact”—a tightly knit enclave of closely related politicians who exercised almost-aristocratic control over Canadian political and economic society.

In December 1837, the revolutionaries formed a provisional government on Navy Island near modern Niagara. Latter-day Saint Moses Nickerson fought alongside Mackenzie, earning himself an indictment for treason.

American supporters shipped money and arms to the soldiers via the Caroline. In a nighttime raid, the British seized the ship and set

---


it afire, leaving one American dead. In February, another raid was being planned for New York. Upper Canadian refugees poured into New England. A wave of patriotic sympathy for the refugees swept across New England. In response to the crisis, locals began to form “Hunters’ Lodges,” a highly secretive combination of armed men planning to assist the suppressed revolutionaries, named after a Canadian refugee who had gone into hiding. The group mirrored the Masonic order through its secret symbols and initiation rites.

Mackenzie wanted to avoid American interference, but the American commitment had gained too much strength. In May 1838, a group of Hunters attempted to take Navy Island, a strategic point in the St. Lawrence waterway. They set fire to the British steamboat, the Robert Peel, calling out: “Remember the Carolina” as it burned against the moonlit waters of the St. Lawrence. The New York State militia threatened to mutiny and join the Canadians.

President Martin Van Buren sent General Winfield Scott to inform the vigilantes that they would be treated as outlaws. Scott was also to inform the British that they should be careful not to attack American holdings; the neutrality treaty of 1818 still held. Scott hoped to broker a peace; but without an armed force, he could offer only hollow words.

As Elder Elijah Ables was baptizing Eunice Ross and ordaining William Riley, nearly two hundred American vigilantes were attempt-

---


ing to invade Canada from Michigan. On June 1, Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur reported rumors about “very serious attacks [that] were to be made upon the Province at several places, within a very short period, by a numerous body of patriots and disaffected persons who had left it.” The attack on the Robert Peel “remove[d] every doubt [that] a large body of persons . . . have banded together to invade the Province.” Throughout July and August, British troops caught several American vigilantes attempting to smuggle arms across the St. Lawrence Riverway. By October, British officials estimated the Hunters to number approximately 200,000. They believed that 25,000 had mobilized to march upon the province.

Chaos enveloped the Latter-day Saint community in Canada. Handbills circulated that Ables had murdered a family of six. Eunice Kinney remembers Ables confronting his congregation: “My friends, . . . I’m advertised for murdering a woman and five children and a great reward is offered for my person. Now here I am; if anyone

1999), 178–82.

137 Tiffany, The Relations of the United States, 55–56.


139 Ibid. See also Arthur, Letter to Lord Glenelg, June 19, 1838, in ibid., 308.


143 Kinney to Watson, September 1891. The archives in St. Lawrence County, New York, and Williamsburg, Ontario, have no contemporary evidence of such a murder. Don Kenny, email to Russell Stevenson, May 3, 2012; my conversation with staff at St. Lawrence County Archives, April 2012.
has anything to do with me, now is your time. But after I commence my services, don’t you dare to lay your hands on me.”

Ables left the town “unmolested,” but now he was a wanted man. In the final days before the Canadian Saints fled to Missouri, a mob bearing hot tar and feathers came hunting for the Mormon “negro preacher” at the home of Alexander Beckstead. They dispersed when Beckstead “got his wife to shoot them.” Ables escaped “soon after.” Broeffle thought that the mob “came for [Beckstead’s] money,” but Beckstead likely lied to Broeffle to conceal Ables’s whereabouts.

Ables was not the only Mormon facing wartime violence. William Burton, a branch president in Mersea, recalled that the “rebellion gave our enemies a good opportunity to persecute us.” Already seen with suspicion, the Saints were transformed from strange heretics into subversives. Why else would they always talk about going to America? “We were called rebels, and some were imprisoned. My father was carried to prison, others brought before magistrates.” Mob action swept across the countryside. “Our windows were all broken by a mob in the night. . . . [M]y former friends and associates, they were almost ready to take my life.”

Another mob stormed the home of John Hampton where a Mormon preacher named Sanders was “holding forth in an unknown tongue.” Hampton attempted to fight off the attackers with a shovel, but he “swung rather at random, hitting none but his own party.” Sanders finally managed to escape—half-naked since the mob had ripped off “most of the rags with which he was covered.”

Ables’s advice to leave Canada was sound; the St. Lawrence Riverway had become a war zone. Van Buren publicly insisted on firm action against the vigilantes, declaring that such actions “deserve to

144Kinney to Watson, September 1891.
145Ibid.
146Broeffle to Beckstead, September 17, 1838.
147Ibid.
148William Burton, Autobiography, MS 1508–2–8, 3.
be put down with promptitude and decision.” He was committed to protecting the integrity of the treaty the United States had signed twenty years earlier promising to remain neutral in Canadian affairs and to disarm the Great Lakes region. Van Buren sent General Hugh Brady and General Winfield Scott to face down 2,500 British troops patrolling the borders to seal off Michigan and New England from both British forces and American vigilantes. Unsuspecting Saints would have been prime targets for both the British troops and the American Hunters.

**Flight from Canada**

While the Saints were fighting off the state militia in Missouri and the Hunters were inciting a revolt in Upper Canada, Ables and the Canadian Saints had problems of their own. By fall, President William Burton “began to discover that it was necessary to leave this part of the world and gather with the Church.” Burton never received Joseph’s call to gather; for his band, it was the “spirit that was manifested by our neighbors put us [in] mind of these matters.”

No documentation exists suggesting that Ables engaged the black community of Upper Canada. Events had deteriorated too rapidly. The civil war had turned the St. Lawrence into a militarized zone; and if “they did not cross the river St. Lawrence by such a time,” then they would probably have been caught in border skirmishes or even been arrested by the Americans. Apparently, the Saints heeded Ables’s advice, looking toward Missouri as a refuge without realizing that it was a second powder keg. In July, Joseph noted that the Cana-

---


152 Burton, Autobiography, MS 1508 2–8, 4.
dian Saints were “emigrating numerously to this land from all parts of the Count[ry]” and, by September, that “the road is literally lined with wagons between here and Ohio.”

John Broeffle recorded that the families of Alexander Beckstead, Stephen Kittles, and several others left in June with the “negro preacher.” Ables’s Saints faced unusually trying circumstances. Other Saints in the area left two months later with plentiful provisions and apostolic guidance. They probably traveled on the north side of Lake Ontario, continuing through Toronto and London. In September, Broeffle wrote that he had recently “heard of them” in Michigan “and the Negro [is] with them.” Beckstead, Gurley, and Merkeley all arrived in Missouri in either the summer or fall of 1838. Burton’s camp was not far behind. Eunice Kinney recalled that some of the Saints stayed with James Blakeslee for several months before setting out for Michigan. She and her family remained in Michigan “until after the death of the martyred prophet” almost six years later. In December 1844, Eunice Ross married non-Mormon Avery Kinney in Berrien, Michigan—a settlement on the state’s far western side. Avery was “an unbeliever” and Eunice lamented in 1876: “God only knows the penalty that I paid” in marrying him. Her family

---


154Kinney to Watson, September 1891.


156History of the RLDS Church, 3:743.


158Eunice Kinney, Letter to Wingfield Watson, May 18, 1891, Perry Special Collections.

159Eunice and her husband divorced (date unknown), and she married Kinney. Eunice Ross, Marriage Certificate to Avery Kinney, Berrien,
“wander[ed] like lost sheep” in Michigan and she “passed through sore afflictions, sometimes wishing my days to be few.”

**THE CINCINNATI MISSION**

In June 1839, Jedediah M. Grant conveyed the aforementioned complaints of Ables’s missionary associates to the First Quorum of the Seventy in Quincy; however, Ables’s presence is not mentioned at the meeting. The complaints might well have been issued *in absentia*. That the hearing was held before the Seventy at all suggests that Ables was indeed a Seventy at this time, and Joseph Smith’s role in the hearing implies his consent to trying Ables as a Seventy. Later leaders remembered Ables’s ordination differently, suggesting that Ables had been ordained a Seventy by Joseph Young but was later dropped from the quorum.  

I have found no contemporary documentation on Ables’s activities between his departure from Michigan and before he was named to the Third Quorum of the Seventy in the spring of 1841.


Eunice Kinney, Letter to Wingfield Watson, November 2, 1876, Perry Special Collections. Kinney to Watson, May 18, 1891, states that she went to Voree in spring 1845. However, Strang did not form his church until fall 1845. “Revelation Given to James J. Strang,” *Historical Collections* 32 (Lansing: Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, 1903), 217.

Quorum of the Twelve Minutes, August 26, 1908, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Box 78, fd. 7.


Dixon, Illinois. A few months later, Joseph presumably assigned Ables to return to the probable site of his baptism: Cincinnati.

The Church had maintained a presence in Cincinnati since Lyman Wight had baptized the first members there in fall 1831. By 1835, Orson Pratt reported that there were almost two dozen Latter-day Saints between the cities of Cincinnati and Fulton. In 1840, John E. Page wrote Joseph from Cincinnati that the residents yearned for the Mormon message: “They grip our hands with tears standing full in their eyes, bidding us farewell and often leave something noble with us to help us on our mission; and a firm promise that they will duly reflect on the great things which we have told them. They ardently request us to send them some competent Elders to preach to them; yes, dear brethren [sic] the cause of truth is marching onward with unparalleled rapidity, and victory! victory! will soon be the shout of all the faithful in Christ.”

Hyde organized the branch under the leadership of Samuel C. Bennett, then left to fulfill his mission to Palestine. In 1841, the branch boasted forty-one members. It also served as a major publishing center for the Church; Cincinnati publishers printed the Kirtland Safety Society’s notes, the third edition of the Book of Mormon, and several affidavits on mob actions in Missouri. At some point in 1842, Joseph commissioned Ables to settle into the Cincinnati popu-

165 Orange Wight, “Autobiography,” typescript, MSS 1025, Perry Special Collections.
166 Orson Pratt, Letter to Oliver Cowdery, February 13, 1835, Latter-day Saints Messenger and Advocate, March 1835, 89–90.
168 Conference Minutes, September 4, 1841, Times and Seasons 3, no. 1 (November 1 1841): 589. For another account of the 1840 Cincinnati conversions, see Ebenezer Robinson, “Items of Personal History of the Editor,” The Return 2, no. 6 (June 1890): 284–85.
lation as one of the “competent Elders.”
Cincinnati was the epitome of the river town, made up largely of immigrant and free black laborers. Missionary Lyman Littlefield complimented it as “a very tidy place, with streets clean and neat.” However, racial violence bubbled just under the surface. In fall 1841, the worst race riot the North had seen exploded in the city. It began with a brawl between Irish Americans and African Americans on Sixth and Broadway in the heart of Cincinnati’s African American industrial community. A lagging economy, increasing permissiveness regarding runaway slaves, and a public celebration memorializing the British abolition of the slave trade all stoked the conflict. One witness recalled that black Americans “were assaulted wherever found in the streets, and with such weapons and violence as to cause death.” The following summer, two Mormon missionaries visited Cincinnati.

170 For a description of industrializing Cincinnati in the 1840s, see Rufus Titcomb, Letter to Lewis Titcomb, October 6, 1844, MS 3395, LDS Church History Library.
but only to inform residents of Nauvoo’s growing strength. Almost certainly Joseph knew he was sending Ables into a highly unstable area. That Joseph trusted Ables to thrive in such an environment speaks volumes about Joseph’s high opinion of the black Elder.

In 1842, Elijah Ables was boarding at a house in Cincinnati’s first ward, within walking distance of the riot sites. He lived in this neighborhood for at least the next eight years but virtually all of his neighbors were born in Germany and had German surnames such as Schmeizer, Hambacher, Becker, Volz, and Schreiner. Unlike the older Germans who had come a generation earlier, Ables’s neighbors were likely refugees escaping the political instability then rocking mainland Europe. They clung to their German identity and were slow to speak English among themselves. Ables probably heard as much German on a daily basis as he did English. German military units often paraded through the streets to celebrate national pride; the spectacle prompted a bloody skirmish in August 1842.

When Ables arrived in Cincinnati, Samuel Bennett was presiding over a branch of fifty. Franklin D. Richards and Phineas Young, Brigham’s brother, served a mission to Cincinnati (November 1841–June 1842) but found the branch torn by dissent. Richards warned

Brigham: “The situation of this church at this time we consider to be indeed critical insomuch that the salvation of this branch seems to depend upon the course that is pursued.”179 Plagued by division, the branch was losing its membership: “There has not been a real union among all the members since we came here.” Richards and Young had immediately excommunicated two members; others were still “unworthy the Name of Christ and are acting the Dog in the Manger.”180 The dissenting Saints were not content to leave the Church; they had

179Franklin D. Richards, Letter to Brigham Young, May 8, 1842, Brigham Young Office Files, CR 1234 1, Reel 54.

to bring the believers down with them. Were “the opposition . . . from the world,” Richards continued, “the work would roll on but it is among the Saints.” The devil and “his notaries had made an enactment that the work of God should not prosper in this city.” But Richards had “the cause of Christ too much at heart to be willing to yield to a mighty power while an Almighty God promises us victory in the Name of Christ.”181 Despite his bold words, Richards recalled Cincinnati as “sterile and loath to bear fruit.”182

The branch meetings Ables attended were in the “Engine house,” a building on the north side of George Street available to any public group.183 In the mid-1830s, the branch had used a schoolhouse in southern Cincinnati near the Ohio River,184 but the Engine House was situated in Cincinnati’s red-light district. Cincinnati sociologist W. P. Dabney wrote in 1926 that George Street was “lined on both sides with pretentious houses, neatly [and] cleanly kept, [that] constituted the principal realm consecrated to the worship of Venus.” Both before and after the Civil War, black and white prostitutes vied with each other for the common game, the white man.”185 At least one murder occurred within walking distance of the Engine House during Ables’s stay.186 By June 1845, the congre-

181Richards to Young, May 8, 1842.
182Franklin L. R. West, Life of Franklin D. Richards: President of the Council of the Twelve (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1924), 47.
183Cist, City Directory, xi. See also Charles Cist, ed., The Cincinnati Miscellany or Antiquities of the West and Pioneer History and General and Local Statistics (Cincinnati: Caleb Clark, 1845), 113.
186“Mayor’s Court,” Ohio Statesman [Columbus], February 8, 1849, 2, http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/newspapers/doc/v2:114748862
In Nauvoo, Joseph was free to voice his views on race without concern for Missourians’ criticisms. In January 1843, his scribe recorded his saying: “Had I anything to do with the negro, I would confine them by strict laws to their own species [and] put them on a national equalization.” As mayor, he opposed intermarriage, fining two black men for trying “to marry white women.” When Joseph Smith ran for president in 1844, he denounced abolitionists as “hireling pseudo-priesthood” who would push “human rights” at the expense of other Americans.

When Joseph’s friend, George Bachman, wrote a fellow Missourian concerning the activities of the Mormons’ former friend, John C. Bennett, in Missouri, Bachman attacked Bennett for his opposition to slavery: “He was a bad man before he joined them [the Mormons]—and his quitting them has made no reformation in other parts of his character. He is now the same abolitionist he always was—the same licentious and adulterous husband—the same false and treacherous friend.” Whatever the sins of the Mormons, Bennett’s “black flag of abolitionism” should be enough for any Missourian to spurn his offers...
of friendship.\textsuperscript{191} In The Wasp, William Smith accused the Missourians of harboring “an abolitionist as a spy” while they “let him practice the real amalgamation among the negresses of their State.”\textsuperscript{192}

But despite Joseph’s belief in social barriers, he was surprisingly open to upward mobility for African Americans. In January 1843, Orson Hyde asked for Joseph’s thoughts on the “situation of the negro”; Joseph responded that they “came into the world slaves mentally & physically.” If whites were to “change their situation,” with the African Americans, the whites would be no better off. In what seems to be an obvious reference to Elijah Ables, Joseph continued: “Go into Cincinnati & find one educated [who] rides in his carriage.” That man “has risen by the power of his mind to his exalted state of reputability.”\textsuperscript{193}

That Joseph associated Elijah with carriage-riding illustrates how removed Elijah was from “blackness” in Joseph’s mind. According to a disapproving newspaper article, when Aaron Burr’s widow visited Cleveland, a carriage was “fitted out to accompany her with a negro in the carriage, and two white n—rs mounted on horseback.” The black man “act[ed] out the ‘monkey’ to perfection.” The spectacle was “designed to insult and ridicule the old lady and her establishment.” The ridiculous sight “excited much mirth among the spectators.”\textsuperscript{194}

If Ables was riding in his own carriage, he did so despite local views on what was appropriate behavior for blacks and biracials.


\textsuperscript{192}“Bennett As He Was,” The Wasp 1, no. 15 (July 23, 1842).

\textsuperscript{193}Joseph Smith, Journal, January 2, 1843, 41–42, http://churchhistorycatalog.lds.org/primo_library/libweb/pages/dvds/dvd20/b1f1-6/seg20.sp (accessed August 2, 2012). The published form is: “Go into Cincinnati or any city, and find an educated negro, who rides in his carriage, and you will see a man who has risen by the powers of his own mind to his exalted state of respectability.” “History of Joseph Smith,” Millennial Star, May 1, 1858, 278.

\textsuperscript{194}“A Shameful Proceeding,” [Cleveland] Plain Dealer, September 2,
While traveling eastbound to Pittsburgh, Heber C. Kimball, John E. Page, Orson Pratt, and Lorenzo Snow held a conference in June 1843 to organize a branch of the Church. Sent on a fund-raising mission for the Nauvoo House, they also served as a traveling disciplinary council to handle difficult matters in the distant branches. Ables’s missionary activities came to the fore of the discussion.

Clearly, Ables’s preaching troubled Cincinnati non-Mormons. Page observed that while he “respects a coloured Bro, wisdom forbids that we should introduce him before the public.” Pratt agreed. Ables assured the leaders that he “had no disposition to force himself upon an equality with white people.” Living in a German neighborhood and interacting with a predominantly white population, Ables apparently focused on carrying out his commission to bind the races together. The apostles “advised [Ables] to visit the coloured population” in accordance with the “duty of the 12 . . . to ordain and send men to their native country.” The conference sustained the decision, and “instructions were then given [Ables] concerning his mission.” Ables apparently accepted these instructions equably.

Following the conference, Kimball and Pratt continued on to Pittsburgh, but Page stayed and “disunnoled what had been done & reorganized the Church.” When Wilford Woodruff and Brigham Young met with the three apostles in Pittsburgh some three weeks later, they asked about “the proceedings of the Twelve in Cincinnati.” After hearing Page’s report, Young “reproved Elder Page some for undoing alone what three of the quorum had done together.” In spite of the exchanged words, Woodruff felt they “had a good time to-


195Joseph Smith, Letter of Introduction for Heber C. Kimball, June 1, 1843, 26, MS 9670, LDS Church History Library.

whether Page’s “undoing” involved Ables is not specified.

THE SUCCESSION CRISIS

As Joseph had prepared to go to Carthage, he suggested that Emma take the children and seek refuge in Cincinnati.198 Would Emma have seen Ables in Cincinnati? There is no way of knowing, although Ables would later provide shelter for William Smith, Joseph’s brother.

Ables then disappears from the documentary record for two years. He likely learned of Joseph and Hyrum Smith’s deaths from either Elder Amasa Lyman or George Adams who were serving missions in Cincinnati in June 1844.199 In the post-martyrdom succession crisis, the two leading figures with claims to prophetic authority were Brigham Young and James Strang.

A recent convert and attorney, James J. Strang declared that he had both documentation and visions establishing him as the successor to Joseph Smith. His arguments were persuasive. As late as May 1847, Apostle Orson Hyde termed him an “honorable imposter.”200 Strang also attracted former apostle John E. Page, upon whom he also bestowed the office of apostle. Initially an ardent Strangite missionary, Page published Strangite literature in Cincinnati;201 Cincinnati’s former branch president, Samuel Bennett, defected in the fall of 1844.

---

199 “Amasa Lyman’s History,” Deseret News, September 15, 1858, 1.
to become another Strangite apostle.\textsuperscript{202}

Cincinnati already had a reputation as a magnet for Mormon dissidents. After excommunicant John C. Bennett ran through his hour of fame with his exposé lectures, letters, and book, he relocated to Cincinnati to teach at the University of the Literary and the Botanico-Medical College, both spurious diploma mills.\textsuperscript{203} Francis Higbee, Bennett’s confidant, also lived for a time in Cincinnati near Bennett.\textsuperscript{204} In fall 1842, Mormon missionary George J. Adams had promised Joseph that he would “lift up my voice like a trump through


\textsuperscript{203}John C. Bennett, Letter, July 30, 1842, \textit{Louisville Journal}, August 6, 1842.

\textsuperscript{204}Francis Higbee, Letter to Joseph Smith, September 8, 1843, http://churchhistorycatalog.lds.org/primo_library/libweb/pages/dvds/media/dvd20/b3f1-8/MS155_3_5_62.jpg (accessed August 18, 2012). In 1844, Joseph Smith spoke of Higbee’s actions during one of the many legal actions filed against him. Higbee had been suffering from a sexually transmitted disease contracted through relations with a French prostitute. Joseph was called upon to administer a blessing to him; when he arrived at Higbee’s home, he found Higbee “on a bed on the floor.” According to the \textit{Times and Seasons}, Joseph’s testimony was “too indelicate for the public eye or ear . . . so revolting has been the conduct of most of this clique, that we feel to dread having anything to do with the publication of their trials; we will not however offend the public eye or ear with a repetition of the foulness of their crimes any more.” Brigham Young and Hyrum Smith also attested to Higbee’s illness. See “Municipal Court,” \textit{Times and Seasons} 5, no. 10 (May 1844): 537–38. For further testimony of Higbee’s sexually transmitted disease, see also “Synopsis of Proceedings in the City Council Against the Nauvoo Expositor,” \textit{History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints}, B. H. Roberts, ed., 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1912), 6:435. William Smith also accused John C. Bennett of homosexuality. See “Bennett As He Was,” \textit{The Wasp} 1, no. 15 (July 23, 1842). For a summary of the evidence that Bennett and Higbee had a homosexual relationship, see An-
this nation I will spoil all JC Bennett’s plans and purposes.”

In the fall of 1842, he preached in Cincinnati where he proved “indefatigable in his exertions to promote the cause of truth.”

But after Joseph’s death, Adams took Bennett’s advice to join Strang and became one of Strang’s boldest defenders. An actor by trade, he loved preaching to large audiences in Boston. Meanwhile, his wife, Caroline, lay ill with her relatives in New Jersey. Seeing little hope of her recovery, George left her, remarried, and relocated to Voree with his new wife, Louisa. He served in Strang’s First Presidency as a counselor and ordained Strang to be king, a ritual that included a formal coronation with a crown and robe.

But when Strang learned that Adams had abandoned his first wife, he ordered Adams and his second wife out of the settlement. Adams spent the remainder of the decade playing in various theatrical companies and preaching as an itinerant minister.

In the early spring of 1846, yet another faction of Cincinnati Saints defected from the Church, “disfellowship[ped] the Twelve, disowning their authority, and strongly condemning their practices with regards to holy stealing [and] the wanton shedding of blood.” The temple was nothing more than a monument to materialism built on the backs of poor English immigrants.

John C. Bennett, in February 1846, rejoiced in the defections, claiming that “both branches of the Mormons here, the Rigdonites and the Twelvetites, disbanded, and all but three individuals acknowledged...”

---


206 “Mormonism,” Times and Seasons 4, no. 2 (December 1, 1842): 27.


208 Holmes, Dreamers of Zion, 90–92.

209 Ralph Harding, Letter to Dwight Harding, March 3, 1846, MS 19884, item 3, LDS Church History Library.
the power and glory of the new prophet."  

The Nauvoo Saints had rejected Sidney Rigdon’s offer to be the Church’s “guardian,” and he went to Pittsburgh where he again asserted his leadership claims. When a faction of Cincinnati branch manifested a disposition in favor of Elder Rigdon, in opposition to the Twelve, thereby causing contention and disunion in the branch,” branch leaders ruled that only those who were “decidedly and unequivocatingly in favor of . . . the Twelve” would be allowed to preach. “Those who were in favor of . . . the Twelve could not fellowship those who opposed them.”  

At a regional conference in March 1845, the Cincinnati branch expressed its “support [for] the Twelve as the Presidency of the Church.”  

Ables was evidently part of this pro-Twelve core, for in June 1845, he “preferred a charge” against three white members—“Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Evans, and Miss Jane Roberts”—for “speaking disrespectfully of the heads of the Church” and failing to attend meetings. All three were excommunicated by unanimous vote. White branch president John Crippin must have seen Ables’s presence as a boon for the Saints: “There is more union existing in this branch than there has been for the last three years.”  

There is no evidence that Elijah Ables gave Strangism serious consideration. In November 1849, a member of Strang’s congrega-

---


213 Minutes of a Special Conference of the Cincinnati [sic] Branch of the Church . . . Held at Elder Pugh’s on the 1st day of June, 1845,” Times
tion asked about the place of African Americans. According to James Blakeslee, Strang gave a double-sided answer: “Who is there that does not labor under a curse?” Skin color was a curse, to be sure, but it should be “no bar” to the priesthood. Death “is the fate of all men, and is a curse incurred by sin.” According to the published minutes, Blakeslee said nothing of Ables’s contributions, in spite of his association with Ables in upstate New York. In 1885, Eunice Kinney, writing to one of the few surviving Strangite leaders, wished that Ables “could read some of your tracts and the claims of James.” Ables would certainly “receive the whole truth.” But at that point, it had been sixty years since she had seen Ables; she was ill equipped to appreciate the depths of Ables’s Cincinnati crucible.

THE WILLIAM SMITH MOVEMENT

While the Nauvoo Saints plodded across Iowa in 1846 and the vanguard company was preparing to roll toward the West in the early spring of 1847, Ables entered a new phase of his life. At age thirty-seven, he married sixteen-year-old Mary Ann Adams, a biracial teenager (and probable runaway) from Nashville on February 16, 1847. Three children were born in Cincinnati: Moroni, Enoch, and Rebecca Ann.

William Smith, Joseph’s only surviving brother, visited Strang in
Wisconsin in the fall of 1847 but became disillusioned. Strang claimed to have holy oil that glowed; William believed he had just used phosphorus.\textsuperscript{217} The Strangites retaliated, charging him with "gross immorality."\textsuperscript{218} William had had dreams of his own church since 1845 when his mother had allegedly seen a vision in which he was to be "President over all the Church" and would have been "crushed . . . down" by the


Twelve “if it had not been for the power of God.” In two days of this description, Lucy backtracked on the wording, assuring Brigham that the vision “referred to herself & her children & not to the Priesthood.” Satisfied, Brigham urged other Church leaders not to harbor “any feelings prejudicial to Mo. Smith.”

In fall 1847, William Smith received a revelation directing him to gather the disenchanted former followers together. He believed that his status as Patriarch gave him legal authority to serve as the Church’s steward until Joseph Smith III would be ordained as the Prophet. In fall 1848, Lyman Wight, another former intimate of the slain Prophet, wrote William from his Mormon colony in Texas that “according to all lineal rights you are left as Patriarch of the Most High God; and Young Joseph to preside over the Church.” In October 1849, Wight’s dissenting branch sustained William as “Prophet, Seer, revelator and translator, untill [sic] some one of the posterity of Joseph Smith his deceased brother shall come forward and take [his] place.”

In 1849, William relocated to Covington, Kentucky, just across the river from Cincinnati. The following spring, William convened a conference in Covington where Wight’s branch was merged into the
former patriarch’s church. Wight believed that Joseph had assigned his colony in Texas to be the Saints’ new gathering place. William Smith affirmed Wight’s claims in a revelation received March 1850, which directed the Covington Saints to relocate to Texas. The union between the factions was made official in April 1850 at a special conference held in Covington.  

Ables had personal contact with virtually all of William’s closest followers in Cincinnati as the Cincinnati branch continued to reel from the apostasy. Orson Hyde, editing the Frontier Guardian in Kanesville, scoffed: “The ‘net gathers of every kind;’ and the bad ones are often drawn out by dishonorable and wicked agents whom the Lord suffers to do such work . . . when it would be too mean and low a calling for a highminded or celestial spirit to engage in.” Smith’s paper responded in kind: “The Brighamite Combination in Cincinnati is now an embodiment of the most abandoned liars, slanderers, and profligate outlaws that that city contains.” LDS branch meetings had been held at John Pugh’s home; in October 1849, Pugh “officially withdrew [his] membership from the Salt Lake Mormon organization to join William Smith.” Dayton native Henry Nisonger served as an apostle in William Smith’s church and boarded at Ables’s home. Yet William Smith’s debt to Ables’s hospitality did not prevent him from using racial epithets. He made a “racial pun


226Johnson, Polygamy on the Pedernales, 126.


228“The Brighamite Combination in Cincinnati,” Melchizedek and Aaronic Herald 1, no. 6 (September 1849): 2.


230William Smith, Letter to the Saints, published in Melchizedek and Aaronic Herald 1, no. 6 (September 1849); see also Johnson, Polygamy on the
of Brigham Young’s name, claiming that Joseph ‘placed his hands upon Brig Ham [two words] Young’s head and pronounced these words: You are of the lineage of Cain through the loins of Ham.’”

At least two of Ables’s missionary associates in Canada also joined William’s movement. Zenas Gurley was active with Nauvoo Mormonism through January 1846. He fell under the sway of the charismatic Strang and served a Strangite mission to Canada in 1849. When Gurley learned that Strang had been secretly practicing polygamy (possibly with Eunice Kinney), he left the movement. In 1850, Gurley was drawn to William Smith’s Covington church. As Gurley went, so went the disenchanted Strangites. Gurley attracted “many branches and nearly all the Saints in Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin” to the Covington sect.

A second Ables associate, James Blakeslee, had been active in the faith since his conversion in 1832, organizing a branch in Utica, New York, in 1842, and sheltering Saints who were fleeing from Canada. He renounced Joseph Smith in May 1844 when the practice of plural marriage became more public and was excommunicated “for apostasy” with Francis Higbee, Charles Ivans, and Austin

---


233 History of the RLDS Church, 3:744.


235 Launius, Joseph Smith III, 83–84

236 Letter from J. Blakeslee,” January 10, 1842, Times and Seasons 3, no. 8 (February 15, 1842): 696; “A Moses of the Mormons” [extracts from selected archival documents], Michigan Historical Collections 32 (Lansing: Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, 1903): 222; see also Van Noord, Assassination of a Michigan King, 72.
Cowles. Blakeslee also successively embraced Strang’s and William Smith’s movements.

In 1850, William’s sect began to fall apart. Following allegations that he had seduced the wife of his editor, Isaac Sheen, William fled Covington for Cincinnati and found temporary safe haven with Elijah and Mary Ann Ables in their small home on the corner of Clinton Street and Western Row where the Nisongers were already living. Allegations of polygamy racked the Williamite community. In spring 1851, William Smith visited another disenchanted Strangite, Jason W. Briggs, in Beloit, Wisconsin. Briggs learned that William’s followers “not only believed in the plurality of wives, but were really in the practice of it stealthily, and under the strongest vows of secrecy.” In spring 1851, William left Cincinnati for Palestine, Illinois, site for a new stake established the previous year. In October 1851, William publicly embraced polygamy, an announcement that completely alienated Gurley, Blakeslee, and Briggs. This announcement served as the impetus for their decision to reorganize the Church.

In 1852, Gurley, Blakeslee, and other disenchanted followers of William Smith formed the “New Movement”—a kind of provisional government for the Church. Like William, they designated Joseph Smith III to be Joseph Smith Jr.’s rightful successor. Gurley himself proposed Joseph III’s name as the president of what became the Reorganized Church. Not all of Ables’s Cincinnati associates continued to associate with dissident factions. In 1854, Henry Nisonger met

---

Utah Mormon missionaries and moved to Utah. Although documentation is limited, it seems clear that Elijah Ables was loyal to the Twelve’s leadership. Genuine disloyalty would have provided ample grounds for stripping him of his priesthood without relying on racial dogmas.

**WILLIAM MCCARY: A BLACK “PROPHET”**

Meanwhile, another black Saint in Cincinnati was crossing paths with Mormonism. In February 1846, Orson Hyde baptized William McCary in Nauvoo and married him to Lucy Stanton, daughter of Daniel Stanton, formerly a high counselor in Daviess County, Missouri, and a stake president in Quincy, Illinois. Later reports from an RLDS organ indicate that a “great parade was made over him” wel-

---


coming him as a “Lamanite prophet.”

That fall, McCary moved to Cincinnati where he began “proclaiming himself to be Jesus Christ” while wearing “Indian garb.” He displayed “scars and wounds received on the cross,” and took credit for “caus[ing] the whirlwind which destroyed Natchez,” his Mississippi home town, in May 1840. Locals took notice of his heavily female congregation. He was allegedly forced out of the city for promoting polygamy.

In the spring of 1847, McCary traveled to Winter Quarters where he impressed the Saints with his talents as a flautist.

His racial status remained shrouded in mystery. Nelson Whipple thought him to be a “mulatto or quarterrun.” The camp clerk, Robert Campbell, thought him to be a “Chocktaw Indian.” Lorenzo Brown described him as a “half breed Indian negro.” Brigham Young’s interactions with McCary would be pivotal in how Ables was received in Utah.

In 1830s Kirtland, the rumors Missourians spread about the
Mormon people’s embrace of African American culture had some basis in reality. The Stantons had been leading figures in the Mormon charismatic scene. Lucy Stanton was a white adolescent girl married to an ordinary white day laborer, Oliver Bassett; but at least two observers identified her as one of the closest followers of a black Mormon charismatic named “Black Pete.” Disapproving spectators remembered how young white women “would chase him about.” They “[f]ell over back on men’s laps,” and re-enacted scenes from the Book of Mormon while in a trance-like state. The Stanton girls stood out for their enthusiasm; they “always got the power.” They screamed “Hello, ‘Glory!’” as they clapped their hands during a prayer meeting moments before falling unconscious on the floor. Pete, a “good singer,” led these ecstatic exercises. Lucy and Oliver separated in 1843; whether a formal divorce was ever completed is unclear.

When Lucy met William at Winter Quarters, he apparently reminded her of the Saints’ Kirtland days. She had been feeling alienated from the Saints; she did not even know whether the Mormons believed in the Bible. According to one disapproving observer, Daniel Stanton and three of his daughters, including Lucy, were all “full believer[s]” in McCary. Her father hosted McCary’s meetings in his home. On March 26, 1847, the Quorum of the Twelve met with McCary to help him determine his racial status. “We were all white once,” he believed, so he wondered: “why [h]av[e] I the stain now.” McCary knew what the Saints were saying about them: “There go the old n——r & his White Wife.” McCary feared that fellow Mormons would “get up a mob to drive me out of the city.” Hamon Cutler had publicly threatened to kill McCary for making alleged sexual ad-

251 Reuben Harmon and Joel Miller, Statements, quoted in Staker, 
_Hearken O Ye People_, 85.

252 “Life Sketch of Semira La Celestine Rosalin Bassett,” 1, copy in my possession.


254 Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations regarding McCary and this meeting with the Twelve come from Quorum of the Twelve Minutes, March 26, 1847, http://churchhistorycatalog.lds.org/primo_library/libweb/pages/dvds/media/dvd18/CR%20100%20318/b1f39-61/CR%20100%20318_2_1_23.jpg (accessed August 3, 2012).
vances to Cutler’s daughter. McCary appealed to the Twelve. “[I] want to understand, whe[the]r I am protected if I do right.”

The minutes record McCary’s anguish and confusion over his racial status. McCary arranged for Dr. John Robinson to examine him in the presence of the quorum, hoping it would tell him whether he was Choctaw or black. Nineteenth-century folk wisdom held that black men had an extra rib that (inexplicably) endowed them with natural athletic ability. If the doctor could determine his race, “then I will tell you what God sent me here for.” He argued that he had “as strait hair as any other person,” a feature then widely regarded as distinctive to Native Americans. Another observer had heard McCary claim that he was “the ancient of days whose hair was as wool &c &c.” Slavery apologists occasionally used this depiction to highlight Christ’s whiteness. Modern black power advocates embraced the image as well, imagining a “buffalo Jesus, wooly, angry, and full of the revelations.”

McCary also taught the transmigration of spirits, a doctrine several Mormon schismatics had embraced under McCary’s teaching

---

258 Brown, Diary, May 25, 1847, McCary is likely alluding to Daniel 7:9: “The Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool.”
while living in Cincinnati. Dr. Robinson carefully examined McCary’s ribs and did not “discover any thing novel.” McCary quickly corrected the doctor: “Mine is here,” he said, then he launched a clever defense of polygamy. Since Lucy, as his wife, was his “odd rib,” his “extra rib” would justify taking plural wives. Brigham corrected him: “Your body is not what is your mission.”

During the course of the hearing, McCary apparently abandoned claims to be Choctaw and freely embraced his status as a black: “I’ve come here & given myself to be your servant. . . . If I am a darky, I want to serve God.” Brigham responded with a resounding “Amen.” McCary begged to be seen as a “common brother” even though he was “a little shade darker.”

Brigham Young: We don’t care about the color.
McCary: Do I hear that from all?
All: Aye.
Heber C. Kimball: Don’t you feel a good spirit here William?

McCary then entertained the men with a tune on his “little thirty six cents flute,” casually chatted in Dutch with one of the men, and poked fun at American colloquialisms.

Brigham enjoined him to ignore the name-calling: “Shew by your actions that you don’t care for what they say—all we do is to serve the Lord with all our hearts.” Brigham directed his fellow apostles to donate $12.50 each to assist McCary in purchasing an outfit for the trek westward. The atmosphere was friendly and reassuring. Young promised McCary that he need not be concerned over having African ancestry: “It’s nothing to do with blood for of one blood has God made all flesh.” Believing that repentance would literally whiten one’s countenance, Young maintained that the Saints had only to “re-pent & regain what we have lost,” presumably referring to man’s luminescent glory from Edenic times. Young pointed to a black priesthood holder as an exemplar: “We have one of the best Elders an African in Lowell—a barber.” Young was referring to Walker Lewis, a black Latter-day Saint whom William Smith, then an apostle in good standing, had ordained in 1843–44. Lewis had remained a member of impeccable credentials while white elders had fallen into sexual immo-

262William Appleby, Letter to Brigham Young, June 2, 1847, Brigham Young Office Files, Reel 30. For an excellent biography of Walker Lewis, see
rality. Not everyone agreed with Brigham. Elder William Appleby wrote Young of Lewis’s ordination: “I wish to know if this is the order of God or tolerated in the Church is to ordain Negroes to the Priesthood.” While the answer at this point would have been in the affirmative, subsequent events gave Young pause about the wisdom of this policy.

Wilford Woodruff expressed bemusement at the episode, noting in his journal on that day: “He was an eccentric character. He was the most perfect natural musician I ever saw on a flute, fife, sauce pan, ratler, whistle &c.” They asked him to play more but McCary grew “disappointed angry & sullen & would not make any music.” Yet on March 30, McCary gave a public concert, another sign that the meeting had been a positive one.

Despite the reassuring tone of the Twelve’s meeting with McCary, Church leaders publicly distanced themselves from McCary’s activities only three weeks later. The exact reasons for the rupture are not clear; Orson Hyde implied theft. Nelson Whipple, a branch president in Springville, Iowa, recorded that McCary had introduced a highly sexualized form of polygamy among his congregation (although he dates the visit to the fall of 1847, rather than the spring): “He had a number of women sealed to him . . . he had a home in which this ordinance was performed. His wife, Lucy Stanton was in the room at the time of the performance, no others were admitted. The

---


263 Wilford Woodruff, Letter to Brigham Young, October 9, 1844, Reel 56: “Elder Ball has taught as well as Wm. Smith the Lowell girls that is not wrong to have intercourse with the men what they please. . . . [T]he Lowell branch is shaking.”

264 Appleby to Young, June 2, 1847.

265 Woodruff, Journal, March 26, 1847, 3:139.

266 Juanita Brooks, *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2009), March 30, 1847, 1:244; Campbell, Diary, March 30, 1847, 64.

form of sealing was for the women to bed with him, in the daytime as I am informed three different times by which they were sealed to the fullest extent.” McCary’s activities “continued for a considerable length of time.” Only when a “Mrs. Howard” learned of McCary’s activities was the nature of the ritual revealed to Springville branch. If Whipple’s memory is accurate, it is possible that the women probably knew nothing of the sexual aspect of the union beforehand and remained silent afterwards out of shame.

McCary’s fear of being killed suggests that he had engaged in some kind of sexual impropriety, though such a hypothesis remains conjectural. If so, then Whipple made a rather significant error in his chronology. Sexual promiscuity was not an element in McCary’s March 1847 hearing before the Twelve nor during the summer. But whatever the offense, McCary’s activities provoked the first public statement connecting priesthood worthiness and skin color. On April 25, 1847, Parley P. Pratt chastised the Saints in Winter Quarters for following “a new thing” led by a “black man who has got the blood of Ham in him which lineage [sic] was cursed as regards the priesthood.” This sermon marked the first on-the-record connection between race and priesthood by a General Authority. Pratt felt that McCary’s movement had introduced disorder into the Mormon community at precisely the time when they needed to embrace “the old thing”: the gospel of Christ that “was old in Adam’s day.” In context, it was an offhand remark buried in the middle of a call for the Saints to unify against cattle raids by the Omaha tribe; but its very brevity suggests

---


269Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling, 439–40, mentions sealings that Joseph Smith performed in 1841–42 with about eleven married women in Nauvoo. Four of the sealings were to wives with faithful husbands and were performed in the husband’s presence, suggesting that the ordinance was Joseph Smith’s effort to establish an enduring eternal network of faithful Saints that would extend beyond the grave. When he was sealed to Sarah Whitney, he also promised sealing blessings to Sarah’s parents, Newel K. and Elizabeth Ann Whitney.


271General Minutes, April 25, 1847, http://churchhistorycatalog.lds.org/primo_library/libweb/pages/dvds/media/dvd18/CR%20100%20318
that McCary’s name had come up before. Brigham blamed the few non-Mormons in the camp for bringing McCary into it: “They would be protected in their rights, but they must not introduce wicked men in the camp for it would not be suffered.”

After Brigham had left for the Rockies, Orson Hyde took the criticism further. God sends “delusive spirits” and “angels” to “gather out the tares.” These “enthusiastic spirits” contaminated the body—for as they stay with us we are the weaker.” Men like McCary were “mice drops” mixed in “with pure metal.” While the apostates who had followed James Strang were “dam[ne]d like gentlemen,” McCary’s followers “would go it in a meaner course.” Yes, he declared with a flash of indignation, “they would follow a n——r prophet.”

At this point, the Saints no longer saw McCary as an entertaining Choctaw but as the “half breed Indian negro who styled himself a prophet.”

McCary’s exact whereabouts in the summer of 1847 are not clear. Lorenzo Brown recorded that McCary had “induced some to follow him across the river to Mosquito Creek” and had “left his company taken his wife and gone south to his own tribe.” At the time of McCary’s departure, the Pottawatomie were in the process of removing from Iowa to a new reservation near Fort Leavenworth. In December 1847, Brigham, back in Winter Quarters, suggested that
McCary had been ostracized from the Pottawatomie for having “negro blood,” so it is possible that he had attempted to affiliate with that tribe.

By mid-June, according to William W. Major, “the negro prophet has made his exit and is defunct.”277 In his autobiography, Nelson Whipple recalled that McCary made a “fast trot” to Missouri, leaving Lucy behind. Eventually, McCary returned for Lucy, and they left together to settle in Jackson County where they were living in 1850.278 They owned one slave, had three children (Seraphine, Celestine, and Musholu279) and reinvented their lives. As the Commissioner of Indian Affairs allegedly wrote, “For many years he resided among the whites, thereby losing the means of tracing his parentage, until assisted by the Indians of the Six Nations.”280 McCary took the Choctaw name of Okah Tubbee, and Lucy assumed the stage name of Laah Ciel Manatoi, claiming to be a Delaware princess. Lucy wrote McCary’s “biography” and sold it in an effort to promote their variety shows. They eventually relocated to Toronto where they stayed until McCary’s death—the details of which remain unknown. Her parents went to Utah in 1852.281 So painful was Lucy’s abandonment that her daughter said nothing of her mother’s

277William W. Major, Letter to Brigham Young, June 16, 1847, Brigham Young Office Files, Reel 30. A scribe said of Major that he had not heard “any orator display as beautiful language, nor give better tone to it; even in the theatre—I don’t think I have heard better.” Meeting Minutes, June 27, 1847, http://churchhistorycatalog.lds.org/primo_library/libweb/pages/dvds/dvd18/CR-100-318/b1f39-61/seg54.jsp (accessed August 1, 2012).


escapades. Lucy eventually moved west and married Herman Bassett, the brother of her first husband, Oliver, probably in Nevada.

In December 1847, Brigham Young finally received Appleby’s question about Walker Lewis’s ordination and Enoch Lewis’s marriage to a white woman. He speculated, in partial answer during a quorum meeting, that Indian tribes would “not own a man who has the negro blood in him” and that the Indians had generally “disowned[ed] the negro prophet [William McCary].” The relationship between the native tribes and African Americans had deteriorated severely as white Americans expanded their settlements westward. In the late eighteenth century, Jean Du Sable, a biracial African with French ancestry, became a prominent Pottawatomi leader after marrying one of their women. Members of the tribe called him the “Black Chief.” Du Sable’s family would later settle present-day Chicago. But as native tribes lost their lands to the American settlers, they felt pressure to adopt the prevailing notions of national identity. The Cherokee and Chickasaw Nations established laws prohibiting black-Indian intermarriage in 1839 and 1858, respectively. The Creek Nation called such intermarriages a “disgrace to our Nation,” punishable by fifty lashes. The Creek and the Cherokee also forbade slaves from owning property and prohibited Afro-Indian children from inheriting Indian property.

Brigham saw all sides of the troubling question. His initial re-

---

283 Ibid.
286 My gratitude to Paul Reeve for suggesting this insight and sharing his research on this topic.
287 Christina Snyder, Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 210–11; Katja May, African-Americans and Native Ameri-
sponse was harsh: “They wd. all av. to be killed.” But torn by Joseph’s inclusiveness, he asked, “If a black man & white woman come to you and demand baptism, can you deny them?” The answer was, clearly, no; but “the law is their seed shall not be amalgamated,” for “mulattoes r [sic] like mules” and “can’t have children.” When Caucasians and Africans “mingle seed it is death [sterility] to all.”288* Still, if interracial couples “will be eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven’s sake,” they “may have a place in the Temple.” Orson Hyde, also present at the meeting, assured Young he was teaching the Saints that “if girls marry the half breeds they r [sic] throwing themselves away & becoming as one of them.” Young agreed: “It is wrong for them to do so.”289**

Young had probably been absorbing contemporary concerns about preserving white purity for decades. One contemporary New York mother worried that her daughter was becoming too much like “the little negroes....[I]f she sees one of them kicking up her heels, up hers must go too. She imitates everything and every body.”290 Northern journalist Frederick Olmstead was shocked to see that “negro women [in Virginia] are carrying black and white babies together in their arms; black and white children are playing together (not going to school together); black and white faces are constantly thrust together out of the doors, to see the train go by.”291****

Before McCary had arrived in Winter Quarters, Young had castigated Saints who “dance[d] and fiddle[d]” like African slaves. Young hedged: “I don’t mean this as degrading the negroes by any means.” But it was not right for white Saints to “turn summersets, dance on their knees, and haw, haw, out loud” as he believed the black population did. Once non-

cans in the Cherokee and Creek Nations (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 45–47.

288Quorum of the Twelve Minutes, December 2, 1847, 7. See also W. Paul Reeve, Black, White, and Mormon, unpublished manuscript, copy in my possession, courtesy of Reeve.

289Ibid.


Mormons learned of their activities, the Saints “would want to creep away in disgrace.”

Isaac Sheen editorialized stingingly: “Mr. Hyde’s ordination of the Lamanite prophet, alias, the Negro Christ, Adam, &c., the marriage of this black Adam with his white Eve, alias Virgin Mary is well-understood here—Can Mr. Hyde tell how many wives this negro has altogether black and white?”

Thus, Brigham had three sources of unease: McCary’s increasingly unsavory personal reputation, the racial assumptions he had absorbed from contemporary society, and scientific discourse on miscegenation.

**The RLDS Position**

In 1865, the close of the Civil War prompted RLDS Church leaders to determine the role of blacks in their faith. Gurley was in the First Presidency, and Blakeslee was a member of the RLDS Quorum of the Twelve. The prolonged discussion ended in a stalemate: “None would vote for it nor against it.” Gurley concluded: “It is evident that we feel we lack wisdom in respect to this question.” Gurley had participated in a priesthood ordination with Ables, and Blakeslee almost certainly knew Ables through his association with Eunice Kinney. Neither mentioned Ables’s work in Canada.

Joseph Smith III soon received revelation directing them to “be not hasty in ordaining men of the Negro race to offices in the church.” The Lord desired “that all may be saved, but every man in his own order, and there are some who are chosen instruments to be ministers to their own race.” In 1889, Emmanuel Eaton, a freed slave living in Upper Canada, became the first African ordained to the RLDS priesthood.

---

292William Clayton’s Journal (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1921), June 29, 1846, 192, 196.

293“O. Hyde’s Slanders,” Melchizedek and Priesthood Herald 1, no. 8 (February 1850): 1.


295“Council,” The True Latter-day Saints’ Herald 7, no. 11 (June 1, 1889).
The Ables Family Reaches Utah

In spring 1853, the Ables family traveled from Cincinnati to Council Bluffs, Iowa, planning to travel in the company of M. Appleton Harmon. Isaac Haight, the immigration agent, expected the Harmon company to reach Utah by mid-July, but Horace Eldredge felt that “the various delays in the States will make the last company very late.” One of them was the Saints’ poverty. Some had “journeyed several thousand miles on foot,” and one woman in Ables’s company had had to ask for her tithing back to finance the trip.296 The Ables family arrived in Utah in October 1853 and settled in the Thirteenth Ward in downtown Salt Lake City.

In a letter either written or dictated by Ables to Brigham Young, he reported the alleged murder of Francis J. Brey, a recent widower in the Harmon company, that had occurred on their trek in September 1853. A merchant group associated with Captain William Barnes passed the Harmon company on September 10. Brey left to purchase more oxen from the merchants.297 They slept by the Muddy Creek near Green River. The next morning, one of the captains of ten, William Davis, went to “git a cup of [c]offee for father Bray & stered the coffee up & gave it to father Bray.” Brey stayed behind “all alone.” After the company “got a little ahead,” Davis and “another young man left the company & was not seen by the company until about noon when they came on behind the wagons with out father Bray.” Most suspected foul play: “The general supposition is that they [k]new were father Bray is.” Davis had been complaining to Ables that he “wished to git back to the <old> old country . . . & had no money or means to help himself with.” As soon as he could “git here and git money or means he would go back.” Within a few months of arriving in Salt Lake City, Davis had “fifty dollars in his pocket.” Ables believed it was “father Brays money for I saw him have some at fort Larme & it ap-


296Isaac Haight, Letter to Brigham Young, July 1, 1853, and Horace Eldredge, Letter to Brigham Young, July 22, 1853, both in Brigham Young Office Files, Reel 32.

peared to be a considerable amount.”298 Several witnesses also saw that Davis was dressing in “vary rich apparel.” Further, Brey’s two “servant girls . . . gave another young man named Robert Nesning Mr. Br[e]ys boots & clothing to put on which leads to [show] that all things were understood about the matter.”299

Other contemporary records do not confirm the murder. In October, Harmon wrote Young of routine matters such as oxen and flour.300 Another camp member, Lucina Boren, mentioned a widower who had “wandered off and was lost” following his wife’s passing. “The company stayed days searching for him but never found him.”301 The important point, however, is that Ables felt sufficiently confident of his place in the Mormon population that he could make such an accusation. I have found no records that Brigham Young investigated this claim or responded in writing to Ables’s letter.

EXCLUSIONARY ATTITUDES

In Utah, Young’s racial attitudes were slowly hardening. On February 13, 1849, the Council of the Twelve met to discuss some relatively mundane matters, such as dividing the city into wards and building schoolhouses. After taking lunch, they met again and chatted casually about “Mesmerism.” Apostle Lorenzo Snow asked Brigham Young about the “case of the African race for a chance of redemption & unlock [sic] the door to them.” Brigham responded with the first statement connecting race and priesthood worthiness: “Pres. Young explained it very lucidly that the curse remains on them bec. Cain cut off the lives of Abel to hedge up his way & take the lead but the L[ord] has given them blackness, so as to give the children of Abel an opportunity to cult[ivate] his place with his desc[endants] in the

---

298The company reached Fort Laramie over a week before Bray left the camp. Bagnall, Diary, August 30, 1853.

299Elijah Ables, Letter to Brigham Young, March 14, 1854, Brigham Young Office Files, Reel 32. Many thanks to Connell O’Donovan for his transcription assistance.


The word “priesthood” appears nowhere in the original minutes. In 1852, when Wilford Woodruff began compiling a history of the quorum meetings, he fleshed out the details of the conversation: “President Young replied with much clearness that the curse remains upon them because Cain cut off the lines of Abe to prevent him & his posterity getting the ascendancy [sic] over himself & his generations his own offering not being accepted of God while Abels was. But the Lord has cursed Cain’s seed with blacknes [sic] & prohibited the the Priesthood that Abel & his progeny may yet come forward & have their dominion place and Blessings in their proper relationship with Cain & his race in a world to come.”

The first installment of the “Manuscript History” was published as “History of Brigham Young” in the Deseret News, but not until January 27, 1858. Lorenzo Snow’s recollection of the meeting more than fifty years later is even more elaborate:

President Snow . . . said that he asked President Brigham Young on one occasion why it was that millions and millions of people were
cursed with a black skin, and when, if ever, this curse would be removed? President Young explained it to him in this way, but whether the President had had this revealed to him or not, he did not know, or whether he was giving his own personal views or what had been told him by the Prophet Joseph. He said that when Cain slew Abel he fully understood that the effects would not end with the killing of his brother, but that it extended to the spirits in eternity. He said that in the spirit world people were organized as they are here. There were patriarchs standing at the head of certain classes of spirits, and there were certain relationships existing which affected their coming into the world to take tabernacles; as, for instance, when Abel came into the world it was understood by Cain that the class of people he presided over as a prince, if they ever came into the world in the regular way, they would have to come thru him. So with Cain, he was a prince presiding over a vast number of a certain class of spirits, and it was natural that they should come through him, if at all, and therefore when Cain slew Abel he understood that the taking of his brother’s life was going to deprive the spirits whom he presided from coming into the world, perhaps for thousands and thousands of years; hence the sin was immense because the effects were immense. Then there was this understanding when the Lord executed judgment upon Cain; the spirits under his leadership still looked up to him, rather than forsake him they were willing to bear his burdens and share the penalty imposed upon him. This was understood when the curse was pronounced upon him, and it was understood that this curse would remain upon his posterity until the class of spirits presided over by Abel should have the privilege of coming into the world and taking tabernacles, and then the curse would be removed.304

When Ables requested his family’s temple ordinances in 1853, Brigham Young “put him off” for unstated reasons, and he “failed to get his wish gratified by the President.”305 According to later reports, this was a “privilege President Young could not grant.”306 In Mormon theology, such ordinances are intimately interwoven with priesthood

304Quorum of the Twelve, Minutes, March 11, 1900, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Box 78, fd. 7.
305Quorum of the Twelve, Meeting Minutes, January 2, 1902, typescript, George A. Smith Family Papers, Box 78, fd. 7.
306Quorum of the Twelve, Meeting Minutes, August 26, 1908, typescript, George A. Smith Family Papers, Box 78, fd. 7.
authority and even salvation itself. No man or woman can be saved without receiving these ordinances either in mortality or in the hereafter.

Only a year before Ables’s arrival in Salt Lake City, Eliza R. Snow penned the verse: “Japhet shall dwell within the tents of Shem / And Ham shall be his servant; long ago / The prophet said: ‘‘Tis’ being now fulfill’d / The curse of the Almighty rests upon / The colored race; In his own time, by his / Own means, not yours that curse will be remov’d.”307 Whatever Young’s racial assumptions, he never held a firm line on slavery. He supported the legislature’s “An Act in Relation to Service,” which legalized African servitude in Utah Territory. “As a people,” Young told Orson Hyde, the Saints “are averse to slavery but . . . wish not to meddle with this subject but leave things to their natural course.”308

The act also banned any kind of white-black sexual relationship. Sexual intercourse between master and slave would “forfeit all claim to said servant or servants to the commonwealth.” Further: “If any white person shall be guilty of sexual intercourse with any of the African race, they shall be subject, on conviction thereof to a fine of not exceeding one thousand dollars, nor less than five hundred, to the use of the Territory, and imprisonment, not exceeding three years.”309 The mere existence of a biracial African American in territorial Utah was evidence of criminal activity.

How Ables felt about the law can only be inferred. As the child of what was likely a rape, he probably would have seen the legislation as a


308Brigham Young, Letter to Orson Hyde, July 19, 1849, Brigham Young Office Files, Box 16, fd. 17.

mixed blessing. While such legislation questioned the rightness of his very existence, it also provided protection for vulnerable women much like his mother who were often exploited in the South. At the 1868 Arkansas Constitutional Convention, black legislator William Grey, attacked an anti-miscegenation clause since it would allow white men to have sexual relationships with black women without serious consequence. Grey suggested that if “any white man shall be found cohabiting with a negro woman, the penalty shall be death.” His proposal was partly facetious; indeed, the audience responded with “laughter and applause.” Acknowledging the problems Grey presented, the legislature did not ban interracial unions. They strongly sympathized with the sentiment.

In 1852, Brigham Young told the Utah Legislature: “If a man had one drop of the blood of Cain in him [he] cannot receive the Priesthood.” Indeed, if a Caucasian “mingles his seed with the seed of Cain the only way he could get rid of it or have salvation would be to come forward & have his head cut off & spill his blood upon the ground.” The penalty for interracial marriage “would also take the life of his children.” In 1863, Brigham Young pointedly declared that the penalty for someone of the “chosen seed who mixes his blood with the seed of Cain is death on the spot.” Blacks were “uncouth, uncomely, disagreeable, and low in their habits, wild, and seemingly deprived of nearly all the blessings of the intelligence that is generally

---

312 Legislator John M. Bradley responded to the proposal: “Let a statute be enacted, based upon this feature of our Constitution, that shall fix the crime and the penalty; and if the penalty be death, as the gentleman suggests, let it be death! I have never belonged to a bleaching-machinery and do not advocate the bleaching process. . . . It shows me a taste that makes Heaven frown and stinks in the nostrils of man.” Ibid., 365. See also Charles F. Robinson II, *Dangerous Liaisons: Sex and Love in the Segregated South* (Little Rock: University of Arkansas Press, 2006), 26–28.
313 Woodruff, *Journal*, January 1852, 4:97. Woodruff misdates the speech. According to George Watt, it was delivered on February 5, 1852.
blessings entitled to them “and the Abolitionists cannot help it, nor in the least alter that decree.” The consequences of granting racial equality could be dire. Another account of the same speech records: “Suppose we . . . declare that it is right to mingle our seed with the black race of Cain . . . and be partakers with us in all the blessings God has given to us. On that very day and hour we should do so, the Priesthood is taken from this Church and Kingdom and God leaves us to our fate. The moment we consent to mingle with the seed of Cain, the Church must go to destruction.”

But Brigham believed the day would come when “all that race will be redeemed and possess all the blessings which we now have.” The horrors of the southern slave system were not lost on him: “I am opposed to the present system of slavery. The Negro should serve the seed of Abraham—but it should be done right—don’t abuse the Negro and treat him cruel.” Plantation slavery “is the ruin of the South” and “ruins any soil.” He insisted that “human flesh to be dealt in as property, is not consistent or compatible with the true principles of government.” For Young, slavery among the Saints gave Africans the opportunity to have a “useful, exalting existence,” unlike those slaves toiling like “beasts of the field” in the southern states. It was important that the Saints always honor “the humanity which attaches to the colored race” without “elevat[ing] them . . . with those whom Nature and Nature’s God has indicated to be their masters.” The Saints were “purchasing [slaves] into freedom” so that they may be exposed to a

315 Brigham Young, October 9, 1859, Journal of Discourses, 7:290.
318 Ibid.
“humane and benevolent society.” Brigham Young advised one slaveholder that if she was forced to sell her middle-aged slave, Jerry, "ordinary kindness would require that you should sell him to some kind faithful member of the Church, that he may have a fair opportunity for doing all the good he desires to do or is capable of doing." If the price was right, Young himself might "purchase him and set him at liberty."*

Known for his hyperbole in public discourse, Young used graphic imagery to emphasize his views: "When you wish the people to feel what you say, you have got to use language that they will remember, or else the ideas are lost to them. Consequently, in many instances we use language that we would rather not use." Instead of the smooth, beautiful, sweet, still, silk-velvet-lipped preaching, you should have sermons like peals of thunder, and perhaps we then can get the scales from our eyes. This style is necessary in order to save many of this people." Outside observers recognized the rapport Young had with the Utah Saints. Young was “ungrammatical, occasionally he was witty, sometimes he was slangy and profane, sometimes he was obscene.” But Young “knew his audience” and “his language could always be understood by the people.”

The paucity of blacks in the territory allowed Brigham Young to denounce abolitionists as radicals and southerners as barbaric without the complications. By upholding the slave system while attacking southern excesses, Young used slavery as a talking point for illustrating the misguided thought of both the northern and southern states. As the Saints submitted their first petition for Utah Territory to become a state in 1849, Young confided in John M. Bernhisel, Utah’s congressional delegate, that the Saints were “not strenuous upon this question” and that they would give up a non-slaveholding cause if it meant shoring up southern support for Utah’s admission to the Un-

---

**Notes:**

Northerners were generally hostile to the Saints regardless, making the South far more promising as potential allies. Their overture to the southern slave system went unappreciated.

The media, both secular and religious, fueled anti-black sentiment. In 1859, non-Mormon Kirk Anderson peppered his *Valley Tan* with scandalous accounts of “mulatto” intrigue and seduction. In one such account, a brother attempted to save his sister from an interracial marriage because such a “connection,” Anderson editorialized, “is repugnant to all the senses.” When his sister told him to leave her alone, the brother exercised unusual moderation. Most men “would have blotted out their disgrace with a single blow.” The anti-black animus even filtered down to fashion; one *Deseret News* columnist warned young white women that curly hair would “make people believe you have negro blood in your veins.”

During the “Move South” to avoid federal troops in the late winter and early spring of 1858, Ables stayed behind while the Saints evacuated Salt Lake City, threatening to leave it in ashes. According to postmaster Warren Foote, “not a woman or a child [was] to be seen” and only occasionally a “lone man walking the streets like a lonely sentinel [sic]. . . . Grass was growing in the deserted door yards and streets.” In June 1858, Ables requested pay for handling livestock belonging to the Perpetual Emigrating Fund. He received ten dollars for his labors. Once the Civil War ended, white Americans faced the reality of an emboldened free black population. Slavery was abolished in the territories in 1862 and in most of the United States in early 1863. The *Deseret News* warned that emancipation would “inten-

325 Brigham Young, Letter to John M. Bernhisel, October 14, 1849, Box 16, fd. 18, LDS Church History Library.


328 Warren Foote, Journal, March 1858, MS 686, LDS Church History Library.

329 Bishop David Evans (Lehi), Letter to Daniel H. Wells, June 1, 1858; Receipt of payment, June 28, 1858, both in Brigham Young Office Files, Reel 36.
sify the war, infuriate the people of the South . . . and bring untold dis-
stasters alike upon the authors and the devoted victims of the mea-
ure.”330 It also uncritically printed a Kentuckian’s satire suggesting a
new flag with “stripes of red, white and black, and instead of the stars
let us put on moonshine.”331

The passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth
Amendments provoked grave concerns. Were black Americans
ready for the freedom? What might they do with it? New England
papers buzzed with new concerns about miscegenation issues.332
Republicans, fearful of being perceived as the “black” party, in-
sisted that Republicans “propose to give negroes the common
rights of manhood and nothing more.”333 Poet Clarence Cook was
called “crack-brained” for suggesting that “the negro race . . . shall
be mixed with ours . . . and in the future, we shall see a fruit of art,
of literature, of social life, the product of this great engrafting,
such as has not been seen in the world.”334 In 1865, Morton
McMichael, the Republican candidate for Philadelphia’s mayor,
hedged on whether “colored folks [shall] ride in the horse cars
while opponents cast him as the “negro equality” candidate.335 In
the West, one state and four territories passed laws banning inter-

330 “Emancipation and Its Effects,” Deseret News, January 7, 1863, 1,
http://udn.lib.utah.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/deseretnews2

331 “Miscellaneous,” Deseret News, April 19, 1866, 7.

332 “Amalgamation Advocated,” Columbian Register (New Haven,
Conn.), 1, http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/newspapers/doc/v2:
109DD9C6D2A18030@GBNEWS-1387D271985F5970-1387757C7101F5
A0-139A82D1C50B1F57 (accessed August 14, 2012).

333 “Miscegenation,” Jamestown [N.Y.] Journal, September 11, 1868, 4,
243DE8@GBNEWS-11AE423C23A96118-11AE423C39B21C70-11AE423

v2:13F620C28F267AE2@GBNEWS-138B6A42E5E38D0-138B5E97521

335 “In the Philadelphia Mayorality Election,” Springfield [Mass.] Re-
publican, October 11, 1865, 4, http://www.genealogybank.com
racial marriage of most kinds. The most horrific example of racial animus in Utah was the murder of African American and former slave Thomas Coleman. Killed probably by local robbers, his death was staged as a race-based murder for Thomas’s alleged associations with white women in Salt Lake City. A placard was left on his chest with the message: “Notice to All N——s! Take Warning! Leave White Women Alone!!!” Coleman himself had been convicted of killing another slave, Shep Hooper, who belonged to William H. Hooper, who had replaced Bernhisel as congressional delegate. While the motive for the murder probably had more to do with Coleman’s earlier killing, his death shows that antimiscegenation rhetoric was often used in association with violence in 1860s Utah.

In spite of Young’s graphic rhetoric, he did little to support the civil government in prosecuting sexual relationships between whites and blacks. In 1863, Nathan Meads married Rebecca Foscue, a “quadroon,” and the couple had several children. They had a sufficiently light complexion that they could pass for white in the census, in spite of...
Joseph Taylor’s observations that they were “all very dark.” 338 In 1872, George Stevens, a Spaniard born in Mexico, married Lucinda Flake, daughter of prominent black Mormon Green Flake. 339 This marriage likely prompted the census enumerator to list George as a “negro” both in the 1900 census and on his death certificate. 340 Only a year after Brigham Young’s death, a “full-blooded Negro” married a Caucasian woman, a union the Salt Lake Tribune called “shocking to the sense of decent people.” Yet the Tribune acknowledged that the union was legal as was a “colored man marrying half a dozen white women.” 341

The ambiguity was unsettling for Saints who were unsure of their lineage. One inquirer, N. B. Johnson, begged Young for clarification:

I have written a few lines by way of a question as my mind have bin & are rather embarrasst . . . [all ellipses Johnson’s] on the account of some who pretend pretend [sic] to understand all mysteries concerning the following question. Therefore after I had applied to three different bishop for an answer & they told me they were not able to answer such a question as it was something new to them. Therefore I was assured by the holy spirit that you could desolve the query which I hope you will condescend to do. The question as follows am I a lawfull heir or not to the priesthood my progeny is as follows all on my fathers side was the white race of men . . . on my mothers side my great grandmother was near a full blooded Canaanite my grandmother was about 3/4 of the Canaanite my mothers father was about one seventh of the Canaanite . . .


now please to let me know whether I am a legal heir or not to the priesthood. . . . Father Morley told me in a blessing . . . said I was of the seed of Epharim & a legal heir . . . but I hope you will please to give you diseson as it will put an end to all controversy if it is agreeable to thy feelings. I would like to see a discourse [on] this subject that is how fair would any legal seed could unite with the Canaanite &c &c then clame an heirship to the priesthood such a disourse <would> give <light> to thousands in Israel or to all of the Latter-day Sts in Zion if you do answer my personal query please direct in care of Bishop Young Payson City.342

Young’s rhetoric appears to have sunk in but not too deeply. There was a looming sense that something was wrong with being black. But how wrong? Where was the line? Aside from Brigham’s comments in sermons and offhanded remarks, Church leadership was vague on how these doctrines ought to be applied. Efforts to enforce the priesthood ban were inconsistent. Significantly, Brigham Young never attempted to strip Ables of his priesthood.

In January 1867, the federal government passed legislation prohibiting the territories from discriminating based on race, making any territorial ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment symbolic.343 Utah was eager to show its support for the amendments; the Union had won, and the Saints knew they needed to side with the allies. They hoped the gesture would persuade northern states to support Utah statehood. Meanwhile, other western states and territories dragged their feet. Idaho Territory agreed to the federal legislation in 1874.344* Oregon rejected the amendment outright in 1870 and did not adopt it until 1959.345* California waited until 1962.346* Thomas L. Kane saw Utah’s willingness to support the hotly debated Fifteenth Amendment as a sign of its desire to be seen as a modern, equal state.
Amendment as leverage to persuade the Republican Party to support Utah statehood: "I have proposed to our party leaders . . . to carry the Fifteenth Amendment by the admission of a number of new States including Utah. They ought to see now more plainly that they need her."347 To expedite the territory’s support, the territorial legislature opted to forgo a constitutional convention, submitted amendments “erasing the word ‘white’” from the constitution, then ratified the document by popular vote—14,000 to 30.348 Whatever Brigham had said in 1852 about blacks participating in government (“Negroes shall not rule us. . . . I will not consent for the seed of Cain to vote for me or my brethren”), he was more than willing to accommodate the federal government now.349 The action carried only symbolic significance, given the few blacks in the territory. Nor did the Republicans show any interest in providing statehood to Utah.

THE ABLES FAMILY IN UTAH

Ables’s response to these events is not known. He worked as a carpenter and hotel manager in Salt Lake City.350 His son, Moroni, worked nearby as a butcher.351 In 1870, Elijah and Mary Ann moved to Ogden, and a former Ogden resident recalls that the family trav-
eled “from ward to ward and . . . all around in Utah putting on min-
strel shows.”352

Such minstrel shows were common enough to be familiar but rare enough to be noteworthy.353 In the eastern states, the “negro minstrel show” had long been an entertainment staple, portraying blacks as intellectually challenged, buffoonish, fun-loving, and care-free. Most minstrel shows in Utah were put on by travelers from outside the territory.354 They often employed whites who donned black makeup and “Ethiopian” attire. At the Salt Lake Theatre’s production of *The Hidden Hand*, a “negro minstrel scene” was deemed “quite successful, being given with considerable spirit.”355 The *Salt Lake Tribune* lauded a minstrel performer, Billy Emerson: “His dancing and every movement were perfectly graceful.” His “negro sketches have nothing in them of the Ethiopian uncouthness which characterizes the performances of a genuine black, yet he preserves all the comedy there is in the negro character.”356 An “Ethiopian” boys’ troupe prompted similar comments: “There was a novel if not artistic show given . . . [T]he performance was Ethiopian in color, and consisted of

352 Land Transfer from Elijah Able to Hosea Stout, November 30, 1870, Hosea Stout Papers, MS 16397, Box 1, fd. 7, LDS Church History Library; Annie Hermine Cardon Shaw, Autobiography, 5, Madeline R. McQuown Papers, Box 22, fd. 31. I have found no comments on the quality or content of these family shows.


songs, dances, and negro dialogues.” While the performance was not “brilliant,” it was “immensely funny and was highly enjoyed by a full house. The boys ought to repeat.”

In Logan, a local male starred with a traveling troupe and played up his role with considerable burlesque; the Logan Leader observed: “With practice and study he would make an excel. [sic] ‘darkey.’”

When white Saints were exposed to genuine black musicians, they began to warm up to them. The Deseret News was pleasantly surprised at John Haverly’s touring group of black musicians: “The performance was far superior to the usual entertainments of that description.”

The leading music critic and composer in territorial Utah, John Tullidge, found the face paint “all humbug, merely introduced to please fashion,” and added critically, “Our legitimate colored brethren and sisters,” could never produce “such excellent renditions of musical compositions.” But when Tullidge heard the singing of Anna and Emma Hyers—the groundbreaking black minstrel troupe based in Sacramento, he confessed: “I was in error... [T]he colored portion of the human family are equally able with first rate cultivation, to render classical compositions as perfectly as the Italians, Americans, Germans, or English.”

Other groups such as Charles Callendar’s minstrel troupe also

---


impressed the Utah audiences.361

By 1870, Elijah and Mary Ann had five more children: Delilah, Elijah Jr., Mary, Maggie, and Flora. The Ableses also took in a young woman named Rola, identified as white in the 1870 census. She was approximately the same age as Moroni and had also been born in Ohio.362 She was not enumerated with any earlier census, and family tradition holds that she was an adopted daughter.363 The census enumerator initially recorded Elijah’s youngest daughter, Flora, as white, likely assuming that she belonged to Rola. When he learned that the child belonged to Elijah, he crossed out the “w,” replacing it with an “m.”

Moroni died in 1871 while still in his early twenties.364 Six years later in December 1877, Mary Ann died of pneumonia “in this city [Salt Lake],” indicating that the family had moved back to the territorial capital.365 Brigham Young died the same year, and Ables approached John Taylor, his successor, again requesting his endowment. However, Taylor and the Twelve decided that Joseph Smith had erred in ordaining Ables to the priesthood. Like those who baptized for the dead without keeping records, the decision to ordain Ables was not “altogether correct in detail” but had been neverthe-

---


363Cassidy Keyes, conversation with Russell Stevenson, September 13, 2012.


less “allowed to remain.”

The struggles of Ables’s sons illustrate the difficulties of mixed-race children in Mormon culture. As the Saints became increasingly integrated with society, black people were increasingly seen, not only as threats to white female virtue, but also to societal stability itself. The Ables boys appeared in the magistrates’ records for various small crimes. At sixteen, Moroni had been tried for and acquitted of petty theft. Enoch and Elijah were often arrested for public drunkenness, petty theft, and assault. By 1880, most of Elijah’s adult children were living in a separate household from their aging father, even though they had room for a German adolescent boarder. Ables lived as a “renter” in the home of James Shelmerdine, a poundkeeper and Sunday School superintendent in the Eighth Ward. Ables con-

---

continued to actively serve as a member of a Seventies quorum.371

Now in his seventies, Ables either volunteered for a mission or accepted a calling, again serving in Cincinnati where one newspaper reported that “the growth of the Mormon enterprise among the colored folks” was apparent.372 However, he soon fell ill, returned to Salt Lake City, and died on Christmas day, 1884.373

WORTHY OF THE NAME

Ables was an exceptional individual; everyone knew that. Yet in death, the uncertainty that vexed the Saints about his place in the kingdom continued to trouble those who remembered him. Although he was acknowledged for his commitment to the Church, early twentieth-century Saints and Gentiles remembered him primarily as “Joseph Smith’s servant.” In 1903 at the funeral of Ables’s Baptist grandson, Eugene Burns, a stake patriarch named Miner allegedly said that Ables was the “only one of his race who ever succeeded in gaining entrance within the pearly gates.” Indeed, “the children whom he left in this world may never be exalted to that state.” He added: “I cannot refrain from speaking of the exceptional qualities of Abel the body servant of Joseph the Prophet. His loyalty to the prophet was wonderful. He stayed constantly at his side.” Ables believed “implicitly in the Mormon faith and was rewarded for that faith.” Most importantly, Miner confirmed that Ables was “raised to the order of the Melchizedek priesthood” in recognition of Ables’s “services to the prophet and his faith in our religion.” Ables was “the only one of his race who ever overcame the condi-

---


373Deaths,” Deseret News, December 31, 1884, 16.
tions of his bondage.\footnote{374} Within weeks, the \textit{Deseret News} issued a rebuttal denying most of the \textit{Tribune’s} reporting. The patriarch, it wrote, “did NOT declare that ‘the dead man could not enter heaven;’ he did not say that ‘an Ethiopian could not reach the state necessary to enter heaven;’ he did not say ‘his soul was doomed before his birth;’ and he did not say ‘there was only one negro in heaven.’” But the \textit{Deseret News} never denied Miner’s comments about Ables’s singular contributions as a black member of the Church.\footnote{375}

Ables’s legacy haunted the Quorum of the Twelve’s ongoing discussions about African Americans. In 1908, President Joseph F. Smith claimed that Joseph Smith Jr. had declared Elijah Abel’s ordination “null and void.” Yet in the same breath, he acknowledged Ables’s faithfulness as a “staunch member of the Church.”\footnote{376} The respect afforded to Ables was denied many of the black community in Salt Lake City. In 1898, the black newspaper, \textit{Broad Ax}, expressed frustration that “no matter how gentlemanly a negro may conduct himself there are many business houses in Salt Lake that refuse to permit colored people to enter their doors.”\footnote{377}

In 1900, Elijah Jr. testified about a woman’s shooting in downtown Salt Lake City in a sensational trial. The local press even included images of the victim’s lover weeping on the witness stand. The \textit{Salt Lake Tribune} dismissed Ables’s testimony as generally useless; he seemed “incapable of giving a direct reply to a question.”\footnote{378} One of

\footnotetext{374}{“No Room for Blacks,” \textit{Salt Lake Tribune}, November 1, 1903, 9, \url{http://udn.lib.utah.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sltrib22/id/63250/show/63019/rec/2} (accessed August 23, 2012).}  
\footnotetext{376}{Quorum of the Twelve Minutes, August 26, 1908, George Albert Smith Family Papers, Box 78, fd. 7.}  
\footnotetext{377}{“The Color Line in Salt Lake City,” \textit{Broad Ax}, July 2, 1898, 2, \url{http://udn.lib.utah.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/broadax/id/6860/show/6882/rec/18} (accessed August 14, 2012).}  
\footnotetext{378}{“Woman’s Story of Tragedy,” \textit{Salt Lake Tribune}, March 4, 1900, 5, \url{http://udn.lib.utah.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sltrib21/id}
its headlines read: “Able Unworthy His Name.”

Ables’s gravestone in the Salt Lake City Cemetery was erected in 2002 by the Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation and the Genesis Group. Beautifully etched with a short list of his accomplishments, its summary of Abels’s life and black Mormon history is commendable. It tells viewers of his family, his missions, and his status as “the first African American to be ordained to the priesthood in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”

His story has come to be rightly identified with the turbulent relationship between Mormons and blacks. Ables’s unwavering commitment to the faith, contacts with the Prophet, and contributions to the missionary effort have made him appealing for Saints who want to understand a troubled past without appearing too radical. For most of the twentieth century, his legacy did not unite black and white Saints. Instead, it served as a racial symbol representing the faith’s troubled past. In the light of a new day, his story can serve the purpose that both he and Joseph Smith intended: the bonding of God’s people without regard to ethnicity or national origin.

---


REVIEWS


Reviewed by Brett D. Dowdle and Samuel Morris Brown

The latest publication of the Joseph Smith Papers Project, Histories, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, 1832–1844, is an invaluable contribution to the project’s growing body of published documents that illuminate the life of Mormonism’s founding prophet. Containing edited and annotated transcriptions of seven of Mormonism’s earliest historical narratives, Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories allows readers to glimpse the beginnings of the LDS Church’s attempts to tell its story.

Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories presents several previously published histories, including Joseph Smith’s 1832 autobiographical sketch, Oliver Cowdery’s 1834–36 history published in the Messenger and Advocate, an edited version of Smith’s 1835–36 journal, three drafts of the now canonized 1838 history, Orson Pratt’s Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and Smith’s 1842 letter to John Wentworth, which drew on Pratt’s pamphlet. Additionally, the volume includes the 1839 “Extract, from the Private Journal of Joseph Smith Jr.” and the lightly revised entry in Israel Rupp’s 1844 encyclopedia of religion: He Pasa Ekklesia (Philadelphia: James Y. Humphreys, 1844). These histories provide important windows into the experiences and phenomena that constituted Smithian Mormonism. The 1832 history displays the deeply personal nature of Smith’s early visions and religious experiences, while the later Wentworth letter and the 1844 history demonstrate more corporate ramifications of those early visions. The 1844 history reads similarly to the Wentworth letter, placing the accounts of Smith’s visionary experiences in the
context of an expanding Mormonism that was seeking recognition as a member of the larger body of Christian religions. And whereas Cowdery’s 1836 journal emphasizes Mormonism’s ecclesiastical and organization expansion, the 1838 history drafts and Smith’s 1839 journal give voice to Mormonism’s experience as a persecuted minority.

Although each of the histories in *Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories* is valuable, the volume’s most important contribution to our understanding of Smithian Mormonism is its inclusion of the “History Drafts, 1838-circa 1841.” *Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories* presents three drafts of the official history in parallel columns, allowing the readers to discover both differences and continuities. Draft 3, edited by Howard Coray, diverges most dramatically from the canonized history, presenting a softer tone and greater respect toward Protestant denominations. Perhaps because he had not personally experienced the Missouri hardships, Coray crafted a gentler narrative that downplayed Mormonism’s history of persecution and its differences with the larger community of American Christianity. For example, the other drafts specify the denominations from which Mormonism eventually severed itself, but Coray’s draft left the identities of these denominations undisclosed. Further, Coray “deleted passages that seemed to be defensive, to plead the cause of the Saints, or to play on the reader’s sympathies” (201). For instance, Coray’s draft softens Smith’s story of persecutory experiences following his first vision, omitting several of Smith’s familiar phrases defending the reality of his experience. Although Smith ultimately passed over the Coray narrative in favor of the more pointed drafts, the existence of Draft 3 demonstrates an early cognizance on the part of some Mormons of the fact that Mormonism’s story could be inflammatory as well as uplifting.

As the introduction to the series states, Joseph Smith directly influenced the creation of collective identity among his followers:

Joseph Smith’s instructions invited all Latter-day Saints to become historians. By calling on each Saint to add a personal chapter to the collective history, Smith’s letter effectively democratized Mormon historical writing. Moving beyond the personal, religious history of Smith’s own life and the sacred history of the church, the call for Latter-day Saints to put their persecution narratives in writing helped create an enduring self-understanding. As well as providing evidence for redress petitions and attempting to draw public sympathy for their plight, the community effort to create history served to strengthen the church’s cohesion and solidify what it meant to be Mormon. History, then, became a means not only to share their story but to forge a shared Latter-day Saint identity. (xxiv)

In addition to providing readers with different perspectives on the early LDS narrative, the publication of the three history drafts represents the continuation of a renewed sense of institutional openness on the part of the LDS Church. The *Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories* editors indicate that, prior to
2010, Drafts 1 and 3 of the 1838 history had remained in the custody of the First Presidency since Joseph Fielding Smith’s presidency, while Draft 2 served as the basis for the “History of Joseph Smith” in the *Times and Seasons* and made up an important component of B. H. Roberts’s *History of the Church*. While it is doubtful that Church leaders will ever see completely eye to eye with historians regarding the question of access to archival sources, the publication of documents like these drafts and the Book of Commandments and Revelations represents an important indicator of a transition toward greater openness.\(^1\)

While the publication of the histories themselves was the chief purpose of the *Joseph Smith Papers*, the transcriptions and annotations represent an invaluable contribution to the volume. Intriguingly, the editors suggest that Joseph Smith’s enumeration of 116 pages for the book of Lehi, may have been “a retrospective approximation based on the later manuscript copy of the Book of Mormon used by the printer” (15 note 59) in which the book of Mosiah began on page 117. Although this observation is of minor importance on its own, it serves as a potent reminder about the fluidity of memory and the important role that such memories played in crafting the Mormon narrative.

Although large portions of Oliver Cowdery’s 1834–36 history have been widely available for several years, the complete publication of the history in *Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories* makes some important contributions to our understanding of early Mormonism’s ecclesiastical structure. The entries for December 5–6, 1834, detail aspects of Cowdery’s role as assistant president of the Church and include a revelation reprimanding Church members for failing to render unto Church leaders “the respect due the office, and calling, and priesthood” (35). The history thus evidences the bureaucratization and growing importance of ecclesiastical office during the Kirtland period.

Importantly, *Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories* subtly educates its readers about the craft of history and the many perplexities that surrounded the creation of early Mormonism’s story. The volume editors skillfully address the questions of authorship and Joseph Smith’s use of scribes/collaborators/co-authors like Warren Parrish, Howard Coray, and W. W. Phelps. For instance, while some Saints may assume that Smith personally authored his history as it appears in the Pearl of Great Price, this volume carefully informs readers that the history was both written and influenced by the personalities and contributions of the various scribes assigned to the project. Although Smith retained

ultimate approval or rejection of various narratives, in Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories readers can see the persistent influence of the writers Smith engaged to assist in his work. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the Wentworth letter’s reliance upon Orson Pratt’s Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, coupled with the literary flair of W. W. Phelps.

With the publication of Volume 1: Joseph Smith Histories, the Joseph Smith Papers continues to make an invaluable contribution to the study of Mormon history. Together with its companion volume, Histories, Volume 2: Assigned Historical Writings, 1831–1847 (released in September 2012), this volume enables historians and researchers to better understand both the details and early historiography of Mormonism. Further, the volume’s detailed notes and commentaries provide readers with the tools to understand the meaning and significance of these documents. It is a volume that will benefit both serious historians and casual students of Mormon history.

BRETT D. DOWDLE {brett.dowdle@gmail.com} is a doctoral student in American history at Texas Christian University and holds a master’s degree in history from Brigham Young University. He has been a research assistant for several historians, including Samuel M. Brown. SAMUEL MORRIS BROWN {smb@samuelbrown.net} is a medical researcher, ICU physician, and cultural historian.


Reviewed by Grant Hardy

The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon is an ambitious but ultimately unsatisfying book. Brant Gardner intends to provide an overview of what is known about the translation of the Book of Mormon and then propose a new explanation of this formative event in Latter-day Saint history. To do so, he divides his study into three parts—a history of the translation, an analysis of the nature of the translation, and a speculative interpretation of the translation process itself. As can be seen from this basic structure, Gardner writes explicitly from the perspective of a believer; that is to say, he accepts the Book of Mormon as a divinely assisted translation of an ancient record. Nevertheless, he notes in the introduction that he will provide “a description that is predominantly naturalistic—with a touch of the divine” (p. xi). Fair enough; this is a book that attempts to ground its interpretations in the publicly observable traces of history. In the end, however, he merely substitutes one mystery for another.
Gardner, as the author of a multi-volume commentary on the Book of Mormon, knows the text well and has shown himself to be a creative interpreter. He has read widely, he is familiar with a lot of facts, and he wants to tackle some of the big questions; but the result often feels more like a series of research notes than fully conceptualized arguments. Gardner offers lengthy quotations from a diverse range of sources, some of which seem only peripherally related to the topic at hand; and he occasionally includes assertions that probably should have been thought out a little more carefully. Because he does not always succeed in clarifying the underlying issues or anticipating what his readers need to know, his book is not as reliable or as helpful as it could be.

Take, for example, a paragraph from the first chapter: “The strangeness of the method the actual witnesses experienced is compounded in the stories where the biblical-sounding ‘Urim and Thummim’ wasn’t the instrument used. Joseph’s wife, Emma, said: ‘Now the first that my <husband> translated, was translated by the use of the Urim, and Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that he used a small stone, not exactly, black, but was rather a dark color.’ In Emma’s story, we not only have the odd face-in-the-hat method, but also a small stone instead of the Urim and Thummim” (7–8). Yet in this quotation Emma does not mention a face in a hat (she does in other sources, but not here), and although Gardner knows that no Latter-day Saint used the term “Urim and Thummim” before 1833 and that it can refer to both the Nephite interpreters and the seer stone (127–28), his description here simply confuses the issue. In any case, despite the common LDS usage, the mysterious oracular instrument of the Old Testament does not have much relevance to a translating device.

In addition, Gardner never explains that the phrases in angle brackets are insertions above the line; you have to go to his source, Dan Vogel’s Early Mormon Documents, for an explanation of this unusual editorial practice. A paragraph later the two alternative translation processes—Urim and Thummim (i.e., Nephite interpreters) versus seer stone in a hat—are expanded into three, so as to include Truman Coe’s 1836 account of “Joseph concentrating through the Urim and Thummim as his finger moved over the text” (8), which is essentially the same as the first alternative. Readers would have been better served by the clear and concise assessment of historical evidence in Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, “Joseph Smith: The Gift of Seeing,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 15, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 48–68.

Gardner seems self-conscious about the association of seer stones with folk magic, and he launches into a multi-chapter disquisition on Mark Hofmann’s forgeries, the differences between magic and religion in biblical and English history, the role of seer stones in popular religion, and Joseph Smith’s transition from village seer to prophet. All of these topics have been dealt with else-
where, often with greater clarity and cogency. When Gardner adds his own insights, they are not always an improvement on his sources. For instance, “the magical worldview is simply a mental map of the environment in which a human population finds itself” (27) does not strike me as a workable definition. His distinction between urban and rural perspectives on magical religion gets muddled when he applies it to early Christianity, which was an urban movement in the Greco-Roman world characterized by practices that might today be considered magical, and it is hard to see how the urban/rural divide works with regard to baseball superstitions (42).

Perhaps the distinction Gardner is making might be better described as “respectable” versus “not respectable,” but it will come as no surprise to historians that the boundary between those rather fluid categories has shifted over time and among different subsets of populations. Historians may wince a bit to read references to “a type of life that had been virtually unchanged for thousands of years” (57) or to learn that villagers in English history and early America “never confused magic with religion,” (98) an assertion that appears to beg the question. And alternative explanations are often readily available. For example, Gardner recounts the story of English converts who turned over two seer stones to George A. Smith, who then presented them to Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. Joseph reportedly “pronounced them to be a Urim and Thummim, as good as ever was upon the earth but he said, ‘they have been consecrated to devils.’” Gardner interprets this statement as evidence that Joseph had “moved across a significant threshold...from rural tradition to urban” (100–101). But rather than showing a new perceptual understanding, this incident might be better explained as an attempt by Joseph to undercut rival claims to spiritual authority, much as was the case with Hiram Page’s seer stone revelations in 1830, which Smith dismissed as deceptions from Satan (D&C 28:11).

In the end, all this seems rather beside the point. Gardner ranges far and wide through the library grabbing anything that comes to hand in an attempt to explain something very specific. The eyewitnesses to the translation describe, in matter-of-fact ways, how Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon by dictating the text to scribes, a phrase or clause at a time, while he looked at a seer stone in a hat. Later discussions about whether this process might be considered magic or miracle is a semantic issue that may reveal something about the sensibilities of Latter-day Saints and their critics, but they don’t tell us much about the translation of the Book of Mormon.

In fact, associations of the production of the Book of Mormon with magic do not seem to have bothered Joseph Smith’s contemporaries all that much. In the hundreds of documents included in the comprehensive online collection 19th-Century Publications about the Book of Mormon (1829–1844), hosted by the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University, the words “magic” or “magical” are applied to the Book of Mormon just seven times, including
two references to “magic spectacles.” Accusations of fraud or deception, on the other hand, are much more prevalent.

Gardner suggests some interesting avenues for future investigation in Chapter 12, when he quickly surveys how LDS ways of thinking about the translation developed over time, with subsections labeled “A Transcript Becomes a Sealed Book,” “Interpreters Become the Urim and Thummim,” “A Hill Becomes Cumorah,” “Indians Become Lamanites,” and “Reformed Egyptian Becomes Hebrew.” His provocative observations are buttressed by references to studies on folklore and collective memory, yet these analytical models may have limited application to eyewitness accounts, particularly when current understandings have their roots in early statements by Joseph Smith.

Similarly, Gardner dismisses the most detailed eyewitness accounts of the translation—from Joseph Knight, Emma Smith, Martin Harris, David Whitmer, and Oliver Cowdery—because they state that Smith, when dictating, would not move to the next phrase until the scribes had gotten the spelling right (110–18). (The account attributed to Oliver Cowdery is a late secondary source; Gardner should have been more critical of its provenance.) We can see from the original manuscript that this was indeed the case with the first occurrence of Book of Mormon names; but because the manuscript also contains numerous misspellings of ordinary words, Gardner concludes that there must have been tacit collusion or influence among the eyewitnesses to such an extent that he discounts the idea that Smith might have read a preexisting text from the seer stone, even though this was the unanimous testimony of those who were closest to the translation process. (Note that Gardner’s concern is not about the impossibility of angels, seer stones, gold plates, or ancient Nephites, all of which he accepts at face value.) I would be hesitant to conclude with Gardner that “accounts that have no basis in experience nevertheless accumulate a similar vocabulary to explain that experience” (118). Similar sounding first-hand accounts often have some basis in shared experience, even if a specific detail, such as the transcription of proper names, may have been overgeneralized.

In the second part of his monograph, Gardner focuses on the nature of the translation. He acknowledges that “unexamined and untested assumptions tell us more of our own preconceptions than they do about the text itself” (145), yet there are few data other than assumptions when we have no ancient source text to examine, no other documents in the original language (Reformed Egyptian), and no other examples of translation by seer stone. Gardner assumes that Smith’s “translation” of the Bible as recorded in the JST is equivalent to what he did with the Book of Mormon, but I’m not convinced that the processes were similar. Certainly the Book of Mormon was not created by revising or augmenting a familiar English text, and I do not think that Smith used a seer stone to produce the JST.

The basic facts are few: The Book of Mormon, as first dictated, included
grammatical errors, misspellings, exact spellings for the first occurrence of
names, and nearly verbatim quotations from the King James Bible (the vari-
ants are sometimes significant, sometimes inconsequential, and sometimes
involve the italicized words). It also featured nineteenth-century evangelical
phrasing, anachronistic terms, and a rather tightly structured narrative
framework. Some observers have claimed that the text includes Hebraic con-
structions—some of which are not evident in the KJV—as well as rhetorical de-
vices and early modern English usages that would have been unknown to
Smith. And finally, Smith felt comfortable revising the grammar in the two
later editions that were published during his lifetime (1837, 1840) and making
some minor modifications in the wording, in a process that does seem similar
to what he did in the JST, though the changes he made to the Book of Mor-
mon text are much, much less substantive than what he added to the Bible.

Gardner offers three alternatives for the translation—literal equivalence,
functional equivalence, and conceptual equivalence—and then examines the
evidence for each in turn. Although his analysis is by necessity rather specula-
tive, and though I wanted to argue with his interpretation at many points, this
was, for me, the most valuable part of the book. He offers a useful summary of
observations made by Royal Skousen, B. H. Roberts, John W. Welch, John
Tvedtines, Donald Parry, and others. He also makes some insightful new points,
such as when he notes that the phrase “and now” signals a transition from topic
to topic, while “and it came to pass” marks temporal sequences (203), or in his
discussion of the use of “chariots” among the Nephites (237–38).

Since he has previously dismissed the testimony of the closest witnesses to
the translation, he can proceed to discount the evidence for the literal equiva-
ience theory espoused by Royal Skousen. Like so many others, Gardner has a
hard time believing that God might be the source of poor grammar, which is,
of course, a theological assumption. While admitting the possibility that dif-
ferent parts of the Book of Mormon may be characterized by different types of
translations, he nevertheless prefers the moderate option of functional equiv-
adence. I was not convinced, though I found his discussion both thoughtful
and thought-provoking. Whether or not one believes that the Book of Mor-
mon is a translation of any sort, there is still a great deal of evidence to be iden-
tified and analyzed before we can begin to understand its language, including
comprehensive lists of biblical quotations, intratextual allusions, nineteenth-
century phrases, and nonstandard grammatical usages.

It is the third section of his book, on the translation process, where Gard-
er makes his most original contribution. Unfortunately, his analysis is mar-
red by an odd combination of science and nonscience. We have seen this ear-
er. For instance, one does not need a lengthy quotation from a neuroscientist
to demonstrate that humans are a story-making, coherence-seeking species
(9), and then Gardner immediately follows that quotation with an assertion of
radical relativism that undercuts the power of science to generate consensus: “Believer or nonbeliever, the story we tell is the result of what is true to and for ourselves” (10), which leaves the reader wondering whether he is talking about an objective reality or about subjective impressions. Too often he seems to conflate the two.

By the way, Gardner has an odd relationship to academic authority. He usually introduces quotations with exhaustive descriptions of titles and positions—some of which are inaccurate according to Wikipedia—as can be seen in the lead-up to the quotation from the neuroscientist just mentioned: “Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, director of the Center for Brain and Cognition and professor in the Psychology Department and Neurosciences Program at the University of California, San Diego, and adjunct professor of biology at the Salk Institute of Biological Studies, elaborates . . .” (9).

Gardner brings more science into the third part of his book because he is looking for a way to resolve the tension between historical accounts reporting that Joseph Smith actually saw a text in the seer stone and his own conclusion that a good deal of the translation originated with Smith himself. In the service of this quest, he mixes scientific accounts of perception and language with the pseudoscience of scrying, along with speculations about how Joseph’s seer stones must have worked. It makes for entertaining reading; but as a rational argument, it’s something of a mess. His hypothesis is that Smith received divine inspiration about Mormon’s record that he mentally put into his own words, which his subconscious mind then visually projected onto the stone in his hat so that he could read it aloud to his scribes.

I hope that I am not misrepresenting Gardner’s ideas, so here is a crucial paragraph: “Our brain’s ability to run visually in reverse, its generative capacity, and the ability to retain vivid mental images, provide the basic answer to how Joseph (or any scryer) could see in a rock (or crystals, suspended egg whites, or obsidian mirrors). Some people are more capable of this process of visual generation; and when their visual input is altered, they can reverse the visual system and generate a vivid image. They can see when they should not be seeing. They can see in an inert stone” (271). The human mind can indeed create visual images, in dreams or in hallucinations, but this process is completely inadequate to explain the creation of a coherent, integrated literary text of several hundred pages.

Gardner’s idiosyncratic model of inspiration, mentalese, articulation into words, visual projection, and oral dictation would be as much of a miracle as a working seer stone. There are no documented accounts in the scientific literature of anything like this, or at least not anything that led to a text like the Book of Mormon. Gardner begins his discussion by conceding: “Although human beings may have been using some method of scrying for about as long as we have been translating from one language to another, the two activities (to my
knowledge) have come together only in the case of Joseph Smith” (261). But to posit an unknown, undocumented mental process as the explanation for an otherwise unknown mode of translation does not look to me like progress.

It is perfectly acceptable to explain the Book of Mormon through naturalistic means, as either conscious fraud or well-meaning delusion. It is also possible to regard the translation of the Book of Mormon as a miracle and still be skeptical of paranormal phenomena such as dowsing, scrying, automatic writing, or seer stones (including Joseph Smith’s own youthful involvement). But because the production of the Book of Mormon—if it is regarded as an actual translation—is such a singular event, it does not make sense to try to understand it scientifically. It is more like the resurrection than like glossolalia. Without other comparable texts that were manifestly produced by unconscious projection onto visual media, without control groups of inspired translators or experiments with working seer stones, we do not have the sort of data that science requires. Gardner’s hypothetical method of translation is an attempt to explain some of the characteristics of the original manuscript—spelling, grammar, diction, biblical quotations, and anachronisms—but he is working more from theological assumptions than from any real evidence of mental or physical processes. The Gift and Power is an attempt to make the Book of Mormon more respectable and more comprehensible in a twenty-first century context. I don’t think that it moves us very far toward that goal, and Joseph’s means of translation remain as much a mystery as ever.

GRANT HARDY (ghardy@unca.edu) is professor of history and religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. In addition to books and articles about early Chinese history and historiography, he edited The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003) and wrote Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).


Reviewed by Benjamin E. Park

J. Spencer Fluhman, assistant professor of history at Brigham Young University, has produced an important book for the field of American religious history. It is also an important contribution to the field of Mormon history, but the latter achievement is mostly incidental—and that’s an important facet of the work. The focus of Peculiar People: Anti-Mormonism and
the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America is not “Mormonism” per se, or even “anti-Mormonism,” but the nebulous status of “religion” in the wake of disestablishment. And in doing so, Fluhman not only offers incisive analysis for the field, but also a model of scholarship for the newest generation of Mormon scholarship.

“This study offers an account of the early criticisms of Mormonism,” Fluhman begins, “and links them with broader ideas about religion and America.” The thesis is that “Mormonism has been central in significant transitions in the nation’s thinking about religion, both as a window on the history of religion’s conceptualization and as a force in the shaping of history” (1). Indeed, after an introduction that curiously, when compared to the rest of the text, focuses on Mormonism, the book offers broad lessons of American culture writ large. Balancing both an impressive breadth of research and depth of analysis, Fluhman doesn’t so much present new documentation as a new lens through which to understand classic anti-Mormon arguments. Surely this is the embodiment of the new generation of Mormon history, where sophisticated analysis and provocative theory merge with the field’s famed tradition of diligent research in order to provide new answers to broader questions.

Importantly, Fluhman does not focus as much on actual encounters and practical applications of these anti-Mormon sentiments—works by Patrick Mason and Sarah Barringer Gordon (citations below) have done much to already cover those topics—but Fluhman’s book is primarily a work of intellectual history, a reconstruction of the tenuous, dynamic, and developing mental world of those who tried to understand and explain Mormonism. Terms like “discursive” and “rhetoric” dominate these pages, drawing on a rich literature of both literary theory and print culture. The following excerpt is an example of his analysis, speaking of post-bellum depictions of Mormonism as a foreign specimen located beyond America’s cultural and civilized borders:

Representations of Mormonism, moreover, cut to the heart of American thinking about history, religion, race, and nation. Indeed, the Latter-day Saints’ geographic exodus from American centers of power anticipated the discursive trajectory of postbellum anti-Mormonism. Increasingly, Mormonism was construed as religiously and culturally alien, and the racialized and gendered forms of those constructs hint at the opposition’s place in the cultural hierarchies undergirding westward and overseas expansion. In its complex transition from a fake religion to an alien one, Mormonism functioned like a screen upon which Americans could project their crises. Its influence in the nineteenth century was thus indirect: it was perceived as a threat, creating a critical forum for some of the century’s pressing ideological issues. (103–4)

Fluhman’s contribution is an important work to the growing field of historical treatments of anti-Mormonism, including the work of Mason, Gordon, Megan Sanborn Jones, and Paul Reeve, all of whom are following in the foot-
steps of Terryl Givens. While Fluhman’s work is obviously indebted to these previous treatments and, in some ways, provides a comprehensive synthesis of various themes found in each of the books, he also departs from them in important ways. Most especially, he demonstrates the evolution of anti-Mormonism through several distinct periods, noting not only the changing nature of Mormonism in the public imagination but also the evolving American conceptions of church and state in particular as well as the nebulous notion of “religion” in general.

The developmental phases of anti-Mormonism dictate how the book is structured. Fluhman frames his discussion around five different points of anti-Mormon conceptualization. First, the “imposter” label “denied authentic religion to various prophets and, as a result, understood them in terms of the political, the economic, or the social” (47); this rationale let Americans maintain their notions of religious liberty by locating deviant groups, like the Mormons, outside of religion’s borders. But while the “imposter” accusation could dismiss the leaders as con men, anti-Mormons were still forced to understand the fact that thousands joined them. Fluhman’s second chapter, on “delusion,” traces how Mormonism’s converts were conceptualized and offers provocative lessons on how belief and mental health were merged together to equate religious enthusiasm with, literally, madness. Obviously, this view of religion required both skilled deceivers (the leaders) and the willingly deceived (members).

Anti-Mormonism eventually evolved from this point, though. But once Mormons were eventually granted a theology, mostly in response to their communitarian ethos, “it was framed from the start by questions of political power” (82). Fluhman’s third chapter, on “fanaticism,” explores how Americans came to the realization that their mythic belief that “religion and politics could be easily defined and separated” was nothing more than “fantasy” (95). The fourth chapter, on “barbarism,” engages depictions of Utah Mormonism that drew on evolving notions of racialization, differentiated Mormonism’s alienness as a religion defined by genetic and ethnic grounds, and capitalized on the fact that Mormons had, by relocating in a geographically isolated locale, also relocated outside of America’s social boundaries.

Finally, Chapter 5 outlines the increase of scientific studies of religion that

---

have allowed Mormons a place at the table of American religions, but which emphasize a new category that still marginalized them from American culture: “heresy.” “Mormons stood to benefit as theology’s hold appeared to weaken before more universalizing or pluralizing comparative taxonomies,” Fluhman explains, but the unfolding notion of religions in the plural only perpetuated Mormons’ vulnerability to attack, if only on a different playing field (127).

Fluhman’s condensed book is obviously packaged for the classroom. It is amazingly compact in its length—the main text numbers a mere 149 pages—and concise in its argument. In this cause, the book succeeds. I strongly recommend it as a potent text for undergraduate courses, particularly for its introduction to the developing notion of “religion” in nineteenth-century America. But the limits imposed by such an approach should also be noted. Due to page restrictions, examples were limited to one or two per section; and while more evidence is usually found in the extensive endnotes, the discussion often cut off just as insightful evidence was introduced. Though undergraduate and graduate students will obviously become the top beneficiaries of this volume, academics who specialize in American religious history may come away wishing for more development. But in general, these shortcomings result more from the book’s structure than the book’s author.

The brilliance of Fluhman’s book is found in his refusal to focus on either Mormonism or anti-Mormonism in and of itself. Rather, his scope is always wider, his lessons always broader—and as a result, it speaks to larger audiences in ways few books of Mormon history have done before; the main focus is the development of “religion” over the course of nearly a century, not any particular religion or specific reactions to a particular religion. Indeed, it joins the short shelf of monographs—along with Kathleen Flake’s Politics of American Religious Identity (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Sarah Barringer Gordon’s The Mormon Question cited above, and Jared Farmer’s On Zion’s Mount: Mormons, Indians, and the American Landscape (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), to name a few—that are significant enough to scholars outside the field of Mormon studies that it will likely be found on numerous course syllabuses and graduate school comprehensive exams. I wholeheartedly recommend Fluhman’s excellent volume and look forward to his future work of similar caliber.

BENJAMIN E. PARK {benjamin.e.park@gmail.com} is a PhD student at the University of Cambridge where he studies the cultural, religious, and intellectual history of early America.
Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan is the publication of research and analysis that Reid L. Neilson did as part of his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In the introduction, Neilson notes that his study begins to fill two long-standing gaps in mission studies: (1) Given the fact that two other scholars have noted that “there is no other religious denomination in the world—Catholic, Protestant, or non-Christian—whose full-time evangelizing force is even close in size to that recruited, trained and supported by the LDS Church,” Nielsen asserts that “one could argue that Mormon mission history is American mission history” (x). Yet “missiologists have ignored the Mormon contributions to the spread of Christianity in Asia, including Japan, as well as the rest of the globe. LDS missionary work is the elephant in the mission studies room that is apparent to all but discussed by few” (x). (2) What is more, “although hagiographic missionary chronicles abound, they usually lack historical perspective and a relationship with the larger Christian missionary community.” In fact, he argues, “I am unaware of a single attempt to compare the Mormon missionary system with that of other Christian organizations in any region, nation or time period” (x). Neilson offers his book as an attempt to fill these gaps in both American religious history and in mission studies.

Neilson states his thesis succinctly: “In this book I argue that the same nineteenth-century LDS theology, practices, and traditions that gave rise to the early LDS Japan Mission in 1901, were paradoxically also responsible for its eventual demise in 1924.” This failure is because “the normative LDS missionary approach was so poorly suited to evangelize non-Christian, non-Western peoples. . . . An unvaried sense of evangelism propriety and practices hindered Mormon missionaries from adapting their message to new cultures, particularly in Asia where the cultural needs were so different. . . . Consequently, the Japan Mission had fewer conversions than other contemporary LDS mission fields and it struggled in comparison with the intra-county Protestant efforts among the Japanese” (xi).

Neilson makes good on his word: This book really is the first in-depth study that situates LDS missionary activities in the context of the general spread of Christianity during the same time period among the same people. In addition, he situates the LDS Church’s understanding of and position toward Asia and Asian religions as well. Not only does he chronicle the various “happenstance” intersections between Japanese civic leaders and Church leaders in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but he notes the First Presidency’s participation in the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, and its subse-
quent theological impact on them—and subsequently on the Church.

Neilson demonstrates skillfully the impact of this meeting on the theological framework of these key Church leaders, who shifted their thinking from “everyone was born with the light of Christ and therefore will respond to the gospel message” to a position that occurred as a possible reaction to the presentation of the Asian religions, which all predate the advent of Christianity. Instead, they began to teach and write that these ancient Asian religions contained truth that was a remnant of ancient Christianity dating back to Adam, and therefore were in need of the pure truths brought forth through the Restoration movement. Importantly, he notes that (1) As a result of their interactions with key Japanese leaders and individuals, Church leaders were convinced that Japan, not China, held the key to evangelization in Asia; (2) However, for unknown reasons, the Latter-day Saints “made little effort to evangelize the first and second generation Japanese living in Mormon country, although they would eventually expend tremendous resources to run a mission in Japan” (32). Neilson asserts that this blind spot was because most Mormons were unable to look beyond the stereotype of seeing the Japanese in the United States as a highly desired labor pool, rather than as prospective converts. It would take a major decline in missionary success in the Atlantic, as well as a continued emphasis on millennialism to convince Church leaders that it was time to fully embrace the Great Commission and send missionaries to Asia.

As noted in the introduction, Neilson begins, in Chapter 3, to explain that the nineteenth-century LDS missionaries’ “mode of evangelism and theological claims to primitive Christianity fired the imagination of prospective converts already saturated in a biblical culture. . . . This entrenched pattern of evangelism, however, paradoxically hampered LDS missionary efforts in non-Christian, non-Western nations during the same era” (35). He explains that, despite the favorable and informative intersections with the Japanese prior to the opening of the Japanese Mission in 1901, this did not “motivate the Latter-day Saints to alter their Euro-American evangelism for. . . Asia” (35). As a result, “the nineteenth century Mormon evangelists ‘imposed’ or ‘translated’ their religious systems in Asia, while other, more successful Christian groups ‘adapted’ or ‘inculturated’ their faith traditions” (36).

What follows is an exceptional taxonomy of “inculturation” versus the “imposed, translated, or adapted” missionary approaches, as well a brief historical survey and comparison between the nineteenth-century LDS missionary model and the American Protestant foreign (APF) model of the same time period. He notes that the APF missionaries were divided over “Christ versus culture” approaches. Some believed that their purpose was solely to bring souls to Christ, while others felt deeply the need to bring the Christian culture of welfare care first, and then teach about Jesus after caring for the people’s temporal needs. And some, of course, embraced a combined approach.
In contrast, LDS missionaries during this time period “did not typically offer educational or social welfare services,” but rather, focused entirely on “unadulterated evangelism,” which meant “preaching Christ, not advancing Western culture, especially American culture, which they often viewed as the antithesis of their gospel message” (43–44).

In contrasting the missionaries themselves, Neilson points out that APF missionaries and LDS foreign missionaries differed in four significant ways—ways that determined the success of the former and the failure of the latter in Asia. First, APF missionaries were primarily from rural backgrounds and were entirely self-selected, serving as lifetime salaried professionals, once they were accepted as missionaries by the denomination of their choice. LDS missionaries, in contrast, were primarily married men ranging in age from thirty to forty, called by their leaders, without prior notice or application, to serve from fourteen to thirty months. This service was at their own or the members’ expense, relying on the New Testament model of evangelizing “without purse or scrip,” which often required a tremendous sacrifice from the families they left behind as well as the members entrusted with their care.

Second, in addition, the vast majority of APF missionaries (approximately 90 percent by the turn of the century) received formal training in colleges and were highly educated compared to the larger American population. Conversely, amateur Mormon missionaries received “informal and narrow preparation” (47) because their leaders expected them to learn evangelization through practice. As a result, LDS mission presidents bemoaned the missionaries who arrived in their assigned fields of labor lacking virtually any training in proselytizing; furthermore, very few had received any higher education. The overall “haphazard preparation [of LDS missionaries] paled in comparison to the missionary schooling of their Protestant contemporaries at divinity schools and missionary colleges” throughout the nineteenth century (48).

Third, the majority of LDS missionaries during this time period bypassed the need for formal language training since Church leaders typically assigned those emigrating from western Europe (or their sons) to return to their native lands as missionaries. In contrast, APF missionaries arrived in their mission fields with the realization that they had the rest of their life to master the language and had funds provided to allow that educational pursuit. In contrast, LDS missionaries to Asia not only received no formal language training prior to entering their fields of labor but could not afford that training upon arrival.

Fourth, APF missionaries were sent to the non-Christian, non-Western world, unlike LDS foreign missionaries who served almost exclusively in the Christianized West. As a result, the LDS foreign missionaries were not prepared to teach non-Christian, non-Western peoples like those in Asia. The combination of these factors, in addition to the fact that APF missionaries focused, not only on bringing souls to Christ but also on providing educational
and welfare services through schools and hospitals as part of their mission outreach, provide the framework for the remainder of Neilson’s missiological study and the primary evidence for his thesis.

Before analyzing the early twentieth-century failure of the Japanese mission, Neilson applied the construct above to aptly demonstrate the reasons behind the failed mission to China (Hong Kong) in 1852. Without exception, his paradigm proved true: The 1852 LDS missionaries to China were inadequately trained in Chinese language and culture; they had insufficient funds to live in China, much less hire an expensive tutor to teach them Chinese. In contrast to the AFP missionaries who were not dependent upon the Chinese for survival but who conveyed an air of comparative success and refinement, the LDS missionaries were clearly impoverished, a condition that the Chinese rejected although it called forth sympathy and compassionate treatment for the missionaries in western Europe. Furthermore, unlike the APF missionaries, the LDS missionaries did not set up schools or offer any social services, which caused a further rift between them and the Chinese. Finally, the methods of evangelizing Americans and Europeans—namely door-to-door tracting, preaching meetings, telling stories, hymn-singing, and exercising spiritual gifts—further distanced them from the peoples of China. As a result, after only a few weeks, the LDS missionaries abandoned their mission to China, while their contemporaneous APF missionaries were able to build up Chinese churches before, during, and after the short 1852 LDS mission to China.

The next section of the book, “Twentieth-Century Challenges in Japan,” not only chronicles the failures of LDS evangelism in contrast with the successes of the Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant missionary efforts, but it also explains why, using the paradigm put forward in the hypothesis and illustrated by historical analysis. The chilling result is an unfavorable, at times disconcerting, portrayal of LDS missionaries and their leaders, evoking the imagery of the “blind leading the blind.” LDS leaders and their missionaries were blinded by their theological paradigm, which was obsessed with identifying the Japanese as descendants of Book of Mormon peoples, thus legitimizing the primary Mormon mission of seeking after the “believing blood of Israel.” In addition, they were equally blinded by their missionary methodologies that worked impressively well in North America, Europe, and Scandinavia, but which nearly universally miscarried in non-Christian Asia.

Neilson is very thorough and accurate in his detailed comparative analysis of the evangelistic methodologies employed by the various groups, more particularly showing the failures of the various methods utilized by the Mormons and the reasons for those failures, in contrast with the comparative successes of the Protestants. This, of course, is the heart of the book and is exceptionally well done. Neilson provides a near-comprehensive treatment of each aspect of missionary methodology used in the Japanese experiment during this time...
period, basing his historical analysis on primary documents, including missionary correspondence, journals, newspaper accounts, etc. While his critical analysis of this particular Mormon evangelical experience is not flattering about LDS missionaries and their leaders—much less faith-promoting for the LDS reader—it is useful to both the scholar and lay Latter-day Saint today in that it proffers invaluable and still salient insights.

The next chapter analyzes the reasons surrounding the decision to close the Japanese mission and Neilson’s perception of those reasons’ validity. He quotes a 1970s study by historian R. Lanier Britsch who proposed three reasons for the closure: (1) problems associated with evangelizing in Japan, which Neilson would argue were within the missionaries’ control; (2) problems outside of the control of the missionaries and their leaders—for example, tensions between the U.S. and Japanese governments or the 1923 Tokyo earthquake; and (3) the inspiration, as well as the anxieties, of leaders in Salt Lake City regarding the mission and its failures to bring converts into the Church. While Neilson does not dismiss Britsch’s findings, he points out that analyzing the final years of the mission through the framework of the Euro-American missionary model yields a clearer understanding of the church’s temporary retreat from Asia. The homogeneity of the missionaries’ personal backgrounds, lack of missionary preparation, and costly financial burdens, together with the church’s relative neglect of the Japan Mission’s need for human resources—the remaining components of the Mormon missionary approach—compounded these problems. Unable to move truly beyond the Euro-American missionary model, the Japan mission was less successful than other LDS mission fields worldwide, and it floundered in comparison with the intra-country Protestant efforts. (121–22)

This chapter contains a scrupulously detailed historical analysis of the withdrawal of the missionary force in the context of these variables, as well as the other variables identified in the Britsch study. However, Neilson is quick to assert that, although the external variables, including political tensions, natural disasters, and Church leaders’ inspirations and anxieties “had a negative bearing on the Japan Mission—they precipitated a sense of crisis—neither doomed the missionary field. Ultimately, church leaders instead closed the mission because of the poor evangelistic results. . . . [It was the failure of the Latter-day Saints to fundamentally modify their Euro-American missionary model to better meet the needs of the non-Christian, non-Western, Japanese audience that led to the mission’s closure” (122).

In an extremely interesting epilogue, Neilson reveals, for the first time, the startling remarks of then Church President Lorenzo Snow at the missionary farewell meeting in Salt Lake City, where the four elders embarking to open the Japan Mission had gathered for their send-off. Uncharacteristically, President Snow shared somber remarks, indicating that the annals of prophetic his-
tory included many examples of devout preachers of the gospel, specifically mentioning Noah, Moses, and latter-day missionary Orson Pratt, who failed in their efforts to evangelize their target audiences. "Not surprisingly," Neilson notes, "Snow’s remarks sobered the festivities that evening" (147). Interestingly, however, Neilson points out that the missionaries themselves (with the notable exception of Apostle Heber J. Grant, a future Church president, who was responsible for temporarily closing the mission) did not see themselves or their efforts as failures. Rather, possessing their "premillenarian orientation," they did not expect to change the world, only to warn it. Despite the initial failure to find fertile ground for their message among the Japanese people, eventually President Grant would pioneer the efforts to evangelize the Japanese living in the Hawaiian Islands; and after that successful endeavor, his successor, George Albert Smith, would reopen the Japan Mission in 1948. The LDS Church has had a constant presence there ever since, with numbers soaring beyond 120,000 in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Neilson’s study concludes that, since the time of the ill-fated Japan Mission of the early twentieth century, the Mormons have overcome nearly all of their former problems, including localizing evangelical practices, providing months of language and culture training, standardizing the length of the missionary’s terms of service, and subsidizing missionary costs. The net effect is a much more “inculturated” and subsequently more successful approach in the twenty-first century.

This book is a welcome addition to the corpus of both religious studies and mission studies literature and is an important first step toward filling the gap Neilson mentions in his foreword. This study’s strengths include Neilson’s clear and concise writing style, as well as his near-comprehensive use of available primary source materials that enabled him to create this carefully composed historical analysis. Additional strengths include the painstaking details incorporated into these comparative analyses between the LDS missionary efforts and those of other Christian faiths during the same time period and location, and the effective way Neilson situated the LDS Japan Mission in its accurate historical context. About the only drawback to this study was a repeated restatement of the hypothesis and findings. Perhaps the post-dissertation editing process could have smoothed out some of the repetition to provide an easier reading experience for the reader, considering that it was being published in book form as the findings of a prior study. However, in fairness, this approach is rather typical and accepted in dissertation writing.

RONALD E. BARTHOLOMEW (bartholomewre@ldschurch.org), holds a faculty position at the Orem LDS Institute of Religion (adjacent to Utah Valley University). He is a missiologist, and his mission studies research has been published in various scholarly journals in the United States and Great Britain.

Douglas J. Bell was a modern soldier, serving in Iraq, a war experience that gave new meaning to his study of the Book of Mormon. He focuses in particular on the men he calls the “prophet-warriors,” serving in times of crisis: Nephi, Alma the Younger, Ammon, the stripling warriors, Captain Moroni, the Gadianton robbers, Mormon, and Moroni. He began his serious study of the Book of Mormon while he was stationed in the war zone of Baghdad. He said, “The prophet-warriors came alive as never before. Their actions took on a new meaning because I saw them as military commanders and not just warriors. The wonder and significance of the ‘war chapters’ seemed to leap off the pages. The dangers of living in a war zone gave new and cherished meaning to life” (1).

Bell grew up in American Fork, Utah. After serving a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Netherlands, he completed his bachelor’s degree in business management at Brigham Young University, completed his master’s at University of Utah, then received a Ph.D. at BYU in higher education. Bell joined the Utah National Guard in 1969. Using his mission experience, he became a Dutch linguist, was trained as an interrogator, and commissioned as a warrant officer. He was also deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 as part of the 142nd Military Intelligence Battalion. In Baghdad he was assigned to interview higher military officers and government officials about Saddam Hussein. Married to Caryl Williams, he is the father of four and also served as a religion professor at Brigham Young University from which he retired in 2010.

Although he takes seriously the importance of his military assignments, Bell’s focus is on the intersection between his personal experience and the scriptural lessons he was learning. He found particular meaning in Nephi’s injunction: “I did liken all scriptures unto us, that it might be for our profit and learning” (1 Ne. 19:23). Bell does exactly this, interpreting the teachings of the prophets, analyzing the battle strategies used by the ancient Book of
Mormon warriors, and describing how we can apply these lessons to our own lives.

For example, Bell relates the often-retold story of the plight of Nephi and his family in the wilderness after they left Jerusalem. Laman and Lemuel were constant complainers, tensions that frequently flared into episodes of anger. When Bell was in the wilderness of Kuwait, he realized that he was close to where Nephi and his family would have traveled. The intense heat, coupled with the wind and dust, was almost unbearable, leading the American soldiers to "murmur." It was easy to blame others for frustrations, and Bell watched as "good people [became] angry and unbearably difficult. They wanted to go home and were relentless in their complaints to the commander" (19). However, as Bell read Nephi’s account in the Book of Mormon, he was struck by the realization that he had become just like Laman and Lemuel. He concluded: “When we examine our own lives, we can see how stress and difficulty have affected our behavior and how easily we can change from a pleasant person to an unpleasant one. When times are tough, it is easy to blame others, become angry, and rebel” (19).

Bell’s scriptural analysis draws a close connection between his life as a soldier in Iraq and the Book of Mormon prophet-warriors: “It will become evident that the skills of a warrior, such as self-control and obedience, also played a role in making them more loyal disciples of Christ” (3).

He wrote, “I was energized by the idea that I was traveling in a region blessed by God. When in Kuwait, I was near the place where the Jaredites had gone to escape from the Tower of Babel. When I eventually went to Iraq, I was in the land of Abraham, Daniel, Ezekiel, Esther [sic], Jonah, and many others” (5). Bell writes of their stories and his own in an attempt to draw the reader deeper into the Book of Mormon and essentially closer to Christ.


This anthology consists of seventy-two essays of 1,500 words or fewer in which the authors focused on their mother’s most memorable characteristics or on the lessons they learned from their mother. Authors include BYU Church history professor Susan Easton Black, basketball star Jimmer Fredette, award-winning author Jeff Savage, marriage and family therapist Matthew Dean Barkdull, Harvard professor Clayton M. Christensen, award-winning songwriter Steven Kapp Perry, and mayor of Ogden, Utah, Matthew Godfrey, in addition to many others.

The essays are organized by the author’s profession, and each grouping is color-coded in the table of con-
tents, with the same color running along the edges of the pages in that section. The first section, Religion, is assigned the color gray and is comprised of twelve essays. An example is Silvia H. Allred. She describes her mother as truly courageous and devoted to service and her children. She is also described as being very resourceful, illustrated by the fact that Silvia and her siblings were never aware of how poor they were as children. “To my mother’s credit, soon after we moved back to San Salvador, they rented a house, registered us for school, obtained the necessary school uniforms and supplies, and we were back to school the next day. We never missed a day of school, and no one knew of our financial destitution because of my mother’s incredible resourcefulness, creativity, and determination to solve our problems” (7).

The second section, government and politics, is colored red, and consists of nine essays. The third section, coded blue, is communication, and contains fifteen essays. Mark Eubank describes his mother as a very loving woman who had great confidence in her children. He says, “At night, my mother would often come into the bedroom where my brother and I slept, sit on my bed, and sing songs as she rubbed my back. Listening to her voice and feeling her hand on my back at the quiet end of a day made me feel secure and cared for. I knew she and my father loved each other and would take care of my brother and me. Everything was going to work out for the best. It was a feeling she radiated” (103).

Green is the color of the fourth section, sports, with five essays. The Olympic gold-medalist Peter Vidmar writes of how very reliable his mother was; she was always there for him and always on time to every event she attended. She was not a boastful woman, but quiet and intelligent. “My mother rarely deviated from the routine of our home. Day after day, week after week, my mother dedicated her impressive intellect and concerted efforts to creating a home of order. . . . Although my mom was quiet, soft spoken, and never drew attention to herself, it was important that she be reliable, and she demanded that of her children too” (166).

The fifth section is business, colored orange, with six essays. J. W. (“Bill”) Marriott Jr. talks of his level-headed and pragmatic mother who was a “quiet hero” behind the scenes of the many businesses that came from the Marriott family. Their flourishing business began with a root beer stand one humid summer in Washington, D.C. “They had to find a way to stay in business when the cold weather came. They decided to convert their root beer stand into a small coffee shop and feature Mexican food. My mother was called on to be the cook but had no experience cooking Mexican food. She walked over to the Mexican embassy and asked their embassy chef for recipes. Her command of the Spanish language must have fascinated him, and he coached
her until she perfected her hot tamale and chili recipes” (178).

The sixth section, arts and entertainment, is light green, and contains the most essays: fifteen essays.

The final section, education, is colored purple, with ten essays. As a cleaning lady, Douglas Thayer’s mother believed strongly in hard work and had no time for excuses. Despite her hard life, she was a very cheerful woman. “In spite of her illnesses, the pain, the struggle to make ends meet, and her disappointments, Mom was a cheerful person, happy with her life and often singing gospel hymns as she worked. She laughed a lot. Friends and family often commented on her lovely laugh” (297).


This book is the memoir of a devout Mormon who, by profession, was an FBI special agent, with the main focus being on those FBI experiences. His experiences as a Mormon bishop are reported more sparsely but include a few moral dilemmas that Mcpheters faced as an agent and as a Mormon.

The narrative style is that of “grandfather’s stories,” with the focus on the challenges of being both an FBI agent and a Mormon bishop simultaneously. Each of the book’s forty chapters focus on a main story.

Mike Mcpheters grew up in the small town of Ketchum, Idaho, and served an LDS mission in Uruguay and Paraguay for thirty months, learning to speak fluent Spanish. Four months after returning from this mission he married Judy; they had met before his mission at a gas station in Ketchum. He then attended school at Brigham Young University where he completed his undergraduate work, later earning master’s degrees in business and also in public administration from City University in Bellevue, Washington. He was not satisfied with the jobs he had worked previously and wanted to do something he found meaningful so he applied for a position with the FBI.

The first of Mike and Judy’s five children had just been born in Boise, Idaho, when he received word that he had been accepted for training in the FBI academy. He was ordered to report to an old post office building in Washington, D.C., in July 1968. He completed his fourteen weeks of training in Washington, D.C., and Quantico, Virginia. His first year of duty was spent in San Diego, California, primarily in tracking down draft dodgers.

Although Mcpheters is relatively restrained about his life as a Mormon, he makes it clear that it was extremely important to him. “I had the tenacity of a bulldog. I was mission oriented, bent on protecting society and bringing about the demise of the bad guy. I was a work horse, not
always the most innovative, nor the most polished, but always ready to walk through a wall for the case. . . . I felt the same zeal in my church responsibilities. I could not stand the thought of a youth under my watch going astray who[m] I might have influenced, or missing an interview with a depressed or distraught person who needed me, or with a couple struggling to keep their marriage together who were in need of my counsel” (80).

Mike was called to be a bishop four separate times: in Miami, Florida; in West Linn, Oregon; in Pendleton, Oregon; and in Vernal, Utah. During his thirty-year career as an FBI agent, he spent nearly fifteen years as a bishop.

Throughout the book, Mcpheters briefly notes the drinking, swearing, and violence typical of some of his FBI colleagues in contrast to his own abstemious lifestyle. “Coming from a religious background, with a taboo against drinking, smoking, carousing, or using profanity, my agent classmates considered me a little peculiar” (4–5). Arranged in general chronological order, the stories recount his career, concluding with an experience at the White House on 9/11; he and Judy were told there was a bomb and had to run to safety. In between are stories of tracking serial killers, drug dealers, and car rings. Mcpheters also helped pioneer the very first SWAT team in Miami.

Probably of most interest to readers are Mcpheters’s stories about how being a Mormon bishop and an agent both helped him do each job better. For example, while he was presiding over a Church meeting, he heard that someone was stealing tools from a Church member’s truck. He left the meeting and used his skills as an agent to get the tools back. “We were both sprinting through a black neighborhood, occupied by curious residents who were being entertained with a footrace between a member of their community and a white man in a dark suit, with his tie flapping in the wind” (xiv).


One Lost Boy: His Escape from Polygamy is a memoir by David Beagley. Despite the book’s title, David Beagley writes about so much more than how he escaped his family’s Mormon fundamentalist culture, which he never identifies by name. His stated goal in writing this autobiography is “to declare to all that we must be patient with the Lord by allowing him to be in charge” (ix).

When David was six years old, his father, Jesse Nielson Beagley, who was working at Geneva Steel in Orem, Utah, was introduced to polygamy by a colleague at work. At that point, he began entertaining thoughts of living a polygamist lifestyle and abandoning his Mormon faith. As his mother, Althea Ovella
Ferrell, had grown up in an active LDS family, she had been taught that family was important above all else. At that point, they were the parents of twelve children, David being the tenth. When David’s father persuaded Althea to support his desire for multiple wives, she painfully accepted his decision to keep the family together; but ironically, as he became more entrenched in the polygamist lifestyle, he distanced himself from his family to pursue more wives. He eventually fathered almost fifty children. (David provides very few details about his father’s other families, his father’s theological views used to justify his lifestyle, or the number of wives he eventually acquired.)

For most of his youth, David lived in harsh poverty and isolation from normal society, moving from town to town in the western United States. He and his brothers worked long days in the fields, turning over the money they earned to their father, who used it to support his search for more wives. David yearned for the happiness he saw in others’ lives.

One day when David was fourteen, he found an unlikely friend in his first crush: Janet Yearsley. Their friendship began when Janet sat beside David on the bus on the way home from school. Eventually, she invited David to her home for dinner with her family. He had been taught that his classmates outside the “true religion” were evil and that he was not to make friends with them. Though scared about the possibility of being caught and severely punished by his older brothers, he accepted the invitation. While there, he was astounded at the happiness and love he felt. These weren’t the evil, unenlightened people he had been told about.

As David observed Janet’s parents and their interactions, it was clear that they had something his parents lacked. “Each time I entered the Yearsleys’ home thereafter I felt the stirring of something special in the deep recesses of my soul. Call it hormones, call it warm cookies, call it the Spirit, I sensed a palpable feeling of goodness permeate their home. I felt warm and accepted” (32).

With this experience and others over the next two years with the Yearsleys, sixteen-year-old David began to plan his escape. He trusted only one brother, eighteen-year-old Jerry and his wife, Pat. Their plan was to leave in separate cars, one headed for Provo Canyon, the other for Little Cottonwood Canyon, where they would spend the night and meet the next morning at the city park in Springville, Utah. By the time he got to Springville, an all-points bulletin had been issued for his arrest. While he was waiting for Pat and Jerry to arrive, he was confronted by a police officer who threatened to take him to jail. This moment was pivotal in David’s life, for he heard a voice giving him the words to say to soften the officer’s heart. The officer let him go but told him to leave his car behind and hurry away, as he was going to report the abandoned vehicle. After aban-
doning many of their possessions and riding in Pat and Jerry’s car, the three made their way to Arizona, where they found refuge with their oldest brother, Jess, who had distanced himself from the family when their father had embraced polygamy.

David began his new life in Flagstaff, Arizona, and joined the LDS Church shortly after arriving. He mustered his courage to write to his mother, reassuring her that he was safe and well. She was the only family member who did not disown him.

When David was nineteen, he applied to become a missionary and was called to serve in Scotland. A year into his mission, he developed an illness that forced him to end his mission early so he could return to the United States for treatment. Dejected and alone, he pleaded with his Father in Heaven: “I prayed, waited, and prayed again. Nothing. No sweet assurance, no burning of the bosom. I felt alone, forsaken, and abandoned ... left to fight through this tragedy by myself” (60).

He had not been abandoned, however; and his compassionate physician helped him cope with weeks of failed treatments. Although only partially recovered, he was able to finish his mission in northern California. His pleadings were finally answered while he was on the train to his new assignment. The words that came into his mind were: “Patience, my son. I’m in charge” (73). This answer changed him. “Then and there, I made a decision. I would start anew. I would leave the old David Beagley behind on the railroad tracks. I didn’t want him following me to California” (73).

Having waited patiently on the Lord, he dedicated himself to the work. Near the end of his mission, he met Roberta Boyd, who was attending her sister’s baptism. She told David that she would never join the Church. David responded cheerfully, “After you have thought about it—and humbled yourself—give me a call” (77). He was surprised to see her at church the next day and even more surprised when he heard the voice of the Spirit whisper, “Go home and read your patriarchal blessing” (79). The next day, while he was preparing to move to a new area of the mission, he read his patriarchal blessing as the Spirit had directed. He was deeply struck by one sentence: “Through your great services as a missionary, you shall be directed to a sweet and virtuous woman. . . . The Spirit shall whisper to you that she is to be your wife” (82). Despite his misgivings about meeting his wife on his mission, he trusted in the Lord and related his experience to his mission president, who counseled him to write Roberta after he had left the area and to see what happened.

Over the next few months, David and Roberta became close friends and began courting upon the completion of David’s mission. They were sealed in the Salt Lake Temple on May 27, 1966. Four weeks after Selective Service had deemed him unfit for military service, the medical condition which had been the
cause of so much suffering went into remission and remains that way today. Through all his trials, David concluded with the message that he wanted to share with his readers: He had learned to trust in the Lord’s promise that He is in charge.
Journal of Mormon History

Call for Articles

Special issue on Mormonism and race

To be published in the summer issue of 2014
Finished papers due July 31, 2013

Special Editors:
Max Perry Mueller: mpmueller@fas.harvard.edu
Prof. Gina Colvin: gina.colvin@canterbury.ac.nz

Goals of the Journal's special issue on Mormonism and race:

This special issue of the Journal of Mormon History aims to broaden and deepen the conversation on Mormonism and race beyond the historical focus on the ban on black men from the Mormon priesthood, and its emphasis on the U.S. experience. In particular we aim to understand “race” beyond the black-white (European-African) binary. We welcome articles ranging in historical focus from the Mormon movement’s founding to the present day. Articles exploring international encounters, race and gender, and race and politics, and race and class are of particular interest.

Requirements: Papers should be original work. Wherever appropriate, concrete evaluation results should be included. Submissions will be judged on originality, technical strength, primary sources, significance, and interest to our readers. Papers should range from 6,000 to 8,000 words. Please submit manuscripts simultaneously to both of the Special Editors listed above. Include separately a brief CV or biography.