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The Mormon People

Their Character and Traditions

Thomas G. Alexander, editor

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Introduction

As Sidney Ahlstrom has observed, Great Basin Mormonism has been variously described as an American subculture, a sect, a mystery cult, a religion, a church, a people, and a nation.¹ The following essays probe a number of facets of the experience of the Mormon people in order to provide a better understanding of their character and their traditions. Originally presented as part of the Charles Redd Lectures on the American West during the 1977–78 academic year at Brigham Young University, these essays provide insights into aspects of Mormon culture ranging from experiences with children to the significance of the symbolism connected with the LDS temple.

That the Mormons must be considered distinctive virtually all would agree; Mormon doctrines and outlook are a radical departure from traditional Christianity. As the Mormon philosopher George Boyd put it, for Latter-day Saints eternity is not the escape from time, as in traditional Christianity—it is never-ending time.² The Mormon idea that man and God are literally of the same species and that men and women may become gods and goddesses is found more easily today in speculative science fiction like Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* than in organized religion. In the nineteenth century, Mormons were communitarians and polygamists while most Americans were laissez-faire capitalists and monogamists. Today, Latter-day Saints resist absorption of their nucleated wards into the larger society and punctuate that resistance by the establishment of a welfare program to care for the poor and a social services system to help those plagued by emotional disorders. These centripetal tendencies are reinforced through the Primary Association, through seminary classes, and even through the concern over poetry, stories, and plays provided for general dissemination.

It would be impossible in a series of essays to cover all aspects of Mormon traditions and culture. For that reason, we have selected only a few of the most important for inclusion in this volume.

Beginning with a general overview of the shape of Mormon country

a century ago, we have considered the Mormon response to the arts, particularly to poetry. The essays thereafter deal with the nineteenth-century marriage practices of the Mormons, the training and care of young children in the Primary Association, and, finally, the symbolic significance of the temple.

In any such endeavor, thanks are due many people. We particularly appreciate the help provided by Chris Hill and Deanne Whitmore in typing and checking sources and the editorial suggestions provided by Jessie Embry.

Notes

1. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2 vols. (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1975), 1:613.
2. George T. Boyd, *Views on Man and Religion*, ed. James B. Allen, Dale C. LeCheminant, and David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: Friends of George T. Boyd, 1979), p. 37.

Mormon Country a Century Ago: A Geographer's View

Lowell C. Bennion

From the point of view of geography as pattern and process rather than as physical setting, it seems unlikely that any other people occupying the Great Basin would have fashioned it in the same way the Mormons did. It is upon the patterns and processes of settlement that Lowell C. Bennion, professor of geography at Humboldt State University, has based this study of the shape of Mormon country in 1880.

Mormon interest in agriculture, for instance, dictated a particular settlement pattern which proved in some ways incompatible with later development based on mining. The emphasis on establishing settlements in the valleys just east of the Wasatch Range rather than in those farther to the west was significant. Since railroad developers were interested in tapping the mineral districts and in reaching across the region to the Pacific coast, many of the older settlements remained isolated from adequate transportation systems for long periods of time. This may help to explain the relative underdevelopment, until recent years, of much of Utah south and east of Provo.

Most provocative, however, is Bennion's suggestion that even during the territorial period Mormons were not in full control of their own settlement patterns. The view that federal land laws may have led these settlers into less of a town-centered system than we have heretofore supposed bears further investigation. In addition, the role of gentiles in the development of Salt Lake City and other places needs further study.

Basically, what Professor Bennion has provided is a preliminary graphic overview of Utah in 1880. His map-essay raises many more questions than he can answer at this point. Fortunately, this is only an introduction to a series of larger studies which will include an atlas of Mormon history and an analysis of the federal population census of 1880. All of those interested in Mormon studies will eagerly await these contributions.

Introduction

The chance to look at the Mormon country of 1880 from a geographer's perspective came to me while I was in Salt Lake City on sabbatical and engaged in two related research projects. One involved the preparation of an atlas of Mormon history from 1830 to 1980; the other focused on an analysis of the federal population census

taken in Utah and adjoining areas in 1880. The Redd Center's cordial invitation to lecture offers me an opportunity to preview both projects before a presumably critical but receptive audience. By looking at Mormon country as it was in 1880—at the point of intersection of these research interests—I hope to add a geographer's perspective to the assessment of Brigham Young and his Great Basin kingdom.

Allow me at the outset to define my point of view by outlining three of the ways in which a geographer might examine "The Mormon People: Their Character and Traditions." Americans who have not had geography since the sixth grade tend to equate it either with the physical environment itself (as implied by its prefix *geo*) or else with the study of how the earth has influenced human settlement. Geographers themselves, however, have become more interested in how people perceive and shape their habitats than in physical influences per se. Unfortunately, few scholars have yet adopted this newer *environmental* approach in order to determine just how Mormons viewed and therefore used the Great Basin–Rocky Mountain region they occupied.¹

Many people also associate geographers with *maps* and expect them to know the names and locations of all the world's countries and all of the states' capitals. In this respect, too, today's geographers may surprise them, even though maps do remain the primary means by which we try to make the earth and its inhabitants as *geographic* as possible. Beyond their obvious use for locational orientation, maps can serve as aids in analyzing distributional patterns and networks connecting places. Both human and physical phenomena have a spatial dimension that often becomes fully visible only after someone has mapped it. Maps, when carefully constructed and analyzed, can illuminate our understanding of major historical movements such as Mormonism by giving us a unique new perspective on them.²

We geographers also like to think that we, more than most scholars, concern ourselves with the basic character of *places* that people have created from the earth's environments. We deal with places and regions in much the same way that historians use dates and periods. Our geographical curiosity makes us wonder, for instance, how and why Mormon country resembled or differed from the rest of the American West in 1880. (The presence of Nevada in

the same Great Basin as much of Utah suggests that the pronounced differences between the two lay less in the physiography of the region than in the peculiarities of their cultures.) Did all Mormon towns look alike, whether located in Dixie or the Bear Lake area? How did early residents of or travelers to Utah describe the territory? Regrettably few researchers have tried to reconstruct the Mormon landscape as of 1880 or any other date, even though requisite sources appear to be abundant.³

In essence, the three approaches of *environment*, *space*, and *place* express a triad of vantage points that together may provide some degree of "ESP" to an examination of the Mormon country of a century ago. Of these three approaches, the second becomes most central to the aims of this essay. But what features of Mormondom at the time of Brigham Young's death should be mapped as part of this approach? We can begin with aspects as basic as the population itself and any of its significant characteristics. Where, for example, were Brother Brigham's 125,000 Saints living by about 1880 (and where exactly were the gentiles and Indians in their midst)? From which states or countries had all of them come? How did the central hive in Salt Lake City maintain contact with the several hundred settlements dispersed throughout Deseret? How did the colonies differ in size and into what kinds of regional units did Church leaders divide them? The data for answering these kinds of questions are available in Church and federal censuses and other records, but hardly anyone has tried to map and assess them in systematic fashion. To get some idea of the potential value of the atlas and the census analysis, we can sample several of the graphics that I have prepared and see what insights we can gain from examining them.⁴

Ideally, I would prefer to present graphics compiled by others to display the spatial character of Mormondom. However, a survey of existing maps for possible inclusion in the atlas suggests no well-developed tradition of mapping Mormons, their culture, or even their environment. Brigham Young sometimes described quite graphically his mental map of a given area that he had traversed, but neither he nor his clerks had the time, skill, or inclination to draw more than simple sketch maps. Subsequent students of Mormon history, with few exceptions, have also failed to produce maps that depict more than the distribution of towns and trails. We can find

excuses for scholars, too; but they carry less credence, given the abundance of mappable materials in the archives and recent examples of what an atlas can reveal.⁵

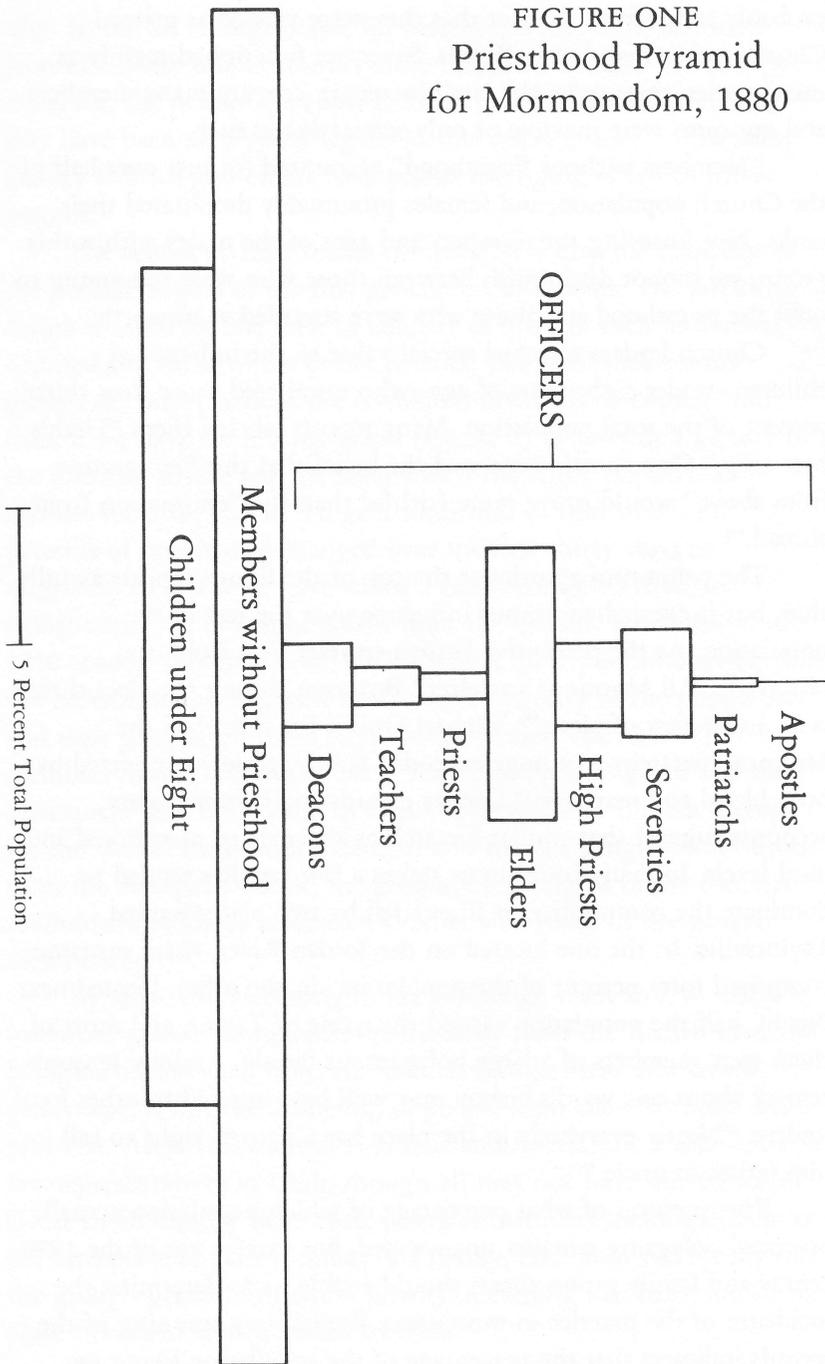
Population Characteristics of Mormondom

By 1880, only the published federal census failed to recognize that the population of Utah consisted of "two peoples," who "do not mingle any more than oil and water."⁶ Its failure to include a question on religious affiliation would seem to preclude the separation of Mormons from non-Mormons on the basis of age and sex (or any other recorded characteristic). Fortunately for scholars, however, those who supervised census-taking in Utah were concerned enough about religion to require notation of it on a margin of the manuscript schedules. There someone designated gentiles with a *G*, apostate Mormons with an *AM*, disfellowshipped members with a *D*, and so on. Once they are coded and collated, these original returns will enable us to construct standard age-sex pyramids for each of Utah's major peoples (although not for the native Utes and Paiutes).

For now, we must settle for a pyramid of Utah's total population⁷ and make use of the limited statistics gathered by the LDS church from its wards and stakes during the pioneer period. Not until near the end of Brigham Young's life did the Church collect comparable data from its ward and stake units on a regular basis. Instead of grouping members systematically by age and sex, the records listed them largely according to baptism and priesthood (see Figure 1). In 1880, male priesthood holders—broken down by the specific office held—made up twenty-two percent of the Mormon population. Numerically as well as ecclesiastically, Aaronic Priesthood officers occupied the lower end of the "officers" section of the pyramid. To what extent their position mirrored the percentage of the male teenage population we cannot determine without a breakdown of Mormons by age.

Perhaps the only surprising aspect of this unconventional pyramid is the revelation that seventies outnumbered high priests within the Melchizedek Priesthood and were perceived to outrank them. This reversal of their present-day ratio and relationship

FIGURE ONE
 Priesthood Pyramid
 for Mormondom, 1880



probably stems from the fact that they were viewed as general Church rather than local officials. Seventies functioned mainly as missionaries, though by the late nineteenth century many members and quorums were inactive or only semiactive as such.

"Members without Priesthood" accounted for just over half of the Church population, and females presumably dominated their ranks. Not knowing the numbers and ages of the males within this group, we cannot distinguish between those who were too young to hold the priesthood and those who were regarded as unworthy.

Church leaders attached special value to the unbaptized children—under eight years of age—who numbered more than thirty percent of the total population. Many reports labeled them "Utah's best crop." One apostle expressed the belief that this "emigration from above" would prove more faithful than the "emigration from abroad."⁸

The column of apostles at the top of the figure appears awfully thin, but it exerted enormous influence over the rest of the population. As the perceptive British traveler Phil Robinson observed: "All Mormons are 'elect.' But even among the elect there is an aristocracy of piety."⁹ Michael Quinn has described the Mormon hierarchy as a huge extended family, closely connected by both blood and marriage.¹⁰ Census records and contemporary accounts suggest that similar hierarchies also existed at regional and local levels. In many counties or stakes a few families tended to dominate the community, as illustrated by two places named Taylorsville. In the one located on the Jordan River, three surnames comprised forty percent of the population; in the other, located near Nephi, half the population carried the name of Taylor, and most of them were members of a large polygamous family. Andrew Jenson's remark about one ward's bishop may well have applied to other local leaders: "Nearly everybody in the place has a natural right to call him father or uncle."¹¹

The question of what percentage of which population actually practiced polygamy remains unanswered, but careful use of the 1880 census and family group sheets should enable us to determine the incidence of the practice in most areas. Preliminary scanning of the records indicates that the percentage of the population living in

6 polygamous households varied widely, being anywhere from five to

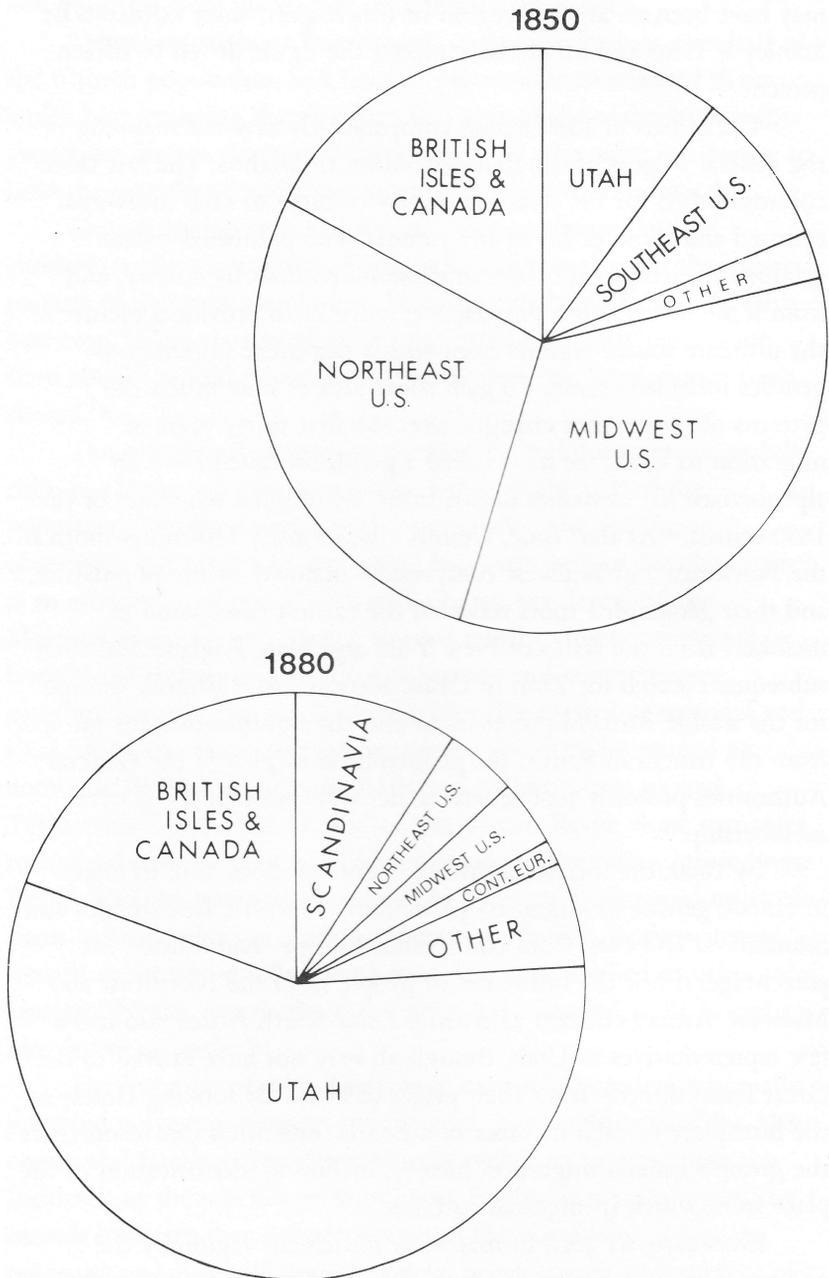
fifty. In the St. George Stake, for instance, where clerk-historian James G. Bleak often recorded more information than the Church asked for, the percentage approximated thirty.¹² But Utah's Dixie may have been an atypical region in this respect, since estimates by Stanley S. Ivins and others have placed the figure at ten to fifteen percent.¹³

The census of 1880 makes comparatively easy the mapping of the general origins of the first generation of Utahns. The last three columns asked for the state or country of birth of each individual counted and those of his or her parents. The published census groups the birthplaces of the counted individuals by county, and from it we have made a pie graph (Figure 2) to provide a picture of the ultimate source regions from which the entire population—gentiles included—came. To gain some idea of how much the patterns of provenance changed over the first thirty years of migration to Utah, we have added a graph compiled from an alphabetized list of names drawn from the original schedules of the 1850 census.¹⁴ At that time, Utahns—then mostly Mormons—born in the Northeast and Midwest comprised a majority of the population, and their geographic roots reflected the earliest conversion of members from the states of New York and New England and their subsequent search for Zion in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois. Except for the sizable British-born element and the not-insignificant number from the American South, the geographical origins of the General Authorities probably represented rather well those of the general membership.¹⁵

By 1880, the increasing influx of foreign-born and, in many instances, gentile immigrants—particularly from the British Isles and Scandinavia and even from continental Europe—had diluted the percentage, if not the influence, of people from the Northeast and Midwest. Areas as distant as Australia and South Africa also had a few representatives in Utah, though all may not have moved to the Great Basin directly from their places of birth. By looking closely at the birthplace of each member of a family, one often can reconstruct the group's general migration history, including identification of the place from which it migrated to Utah.

Eventually we plan to map each settlement region by the origins of its populace as one way of determining who went where

FIGURE TWO
Nativity of Utah's Population



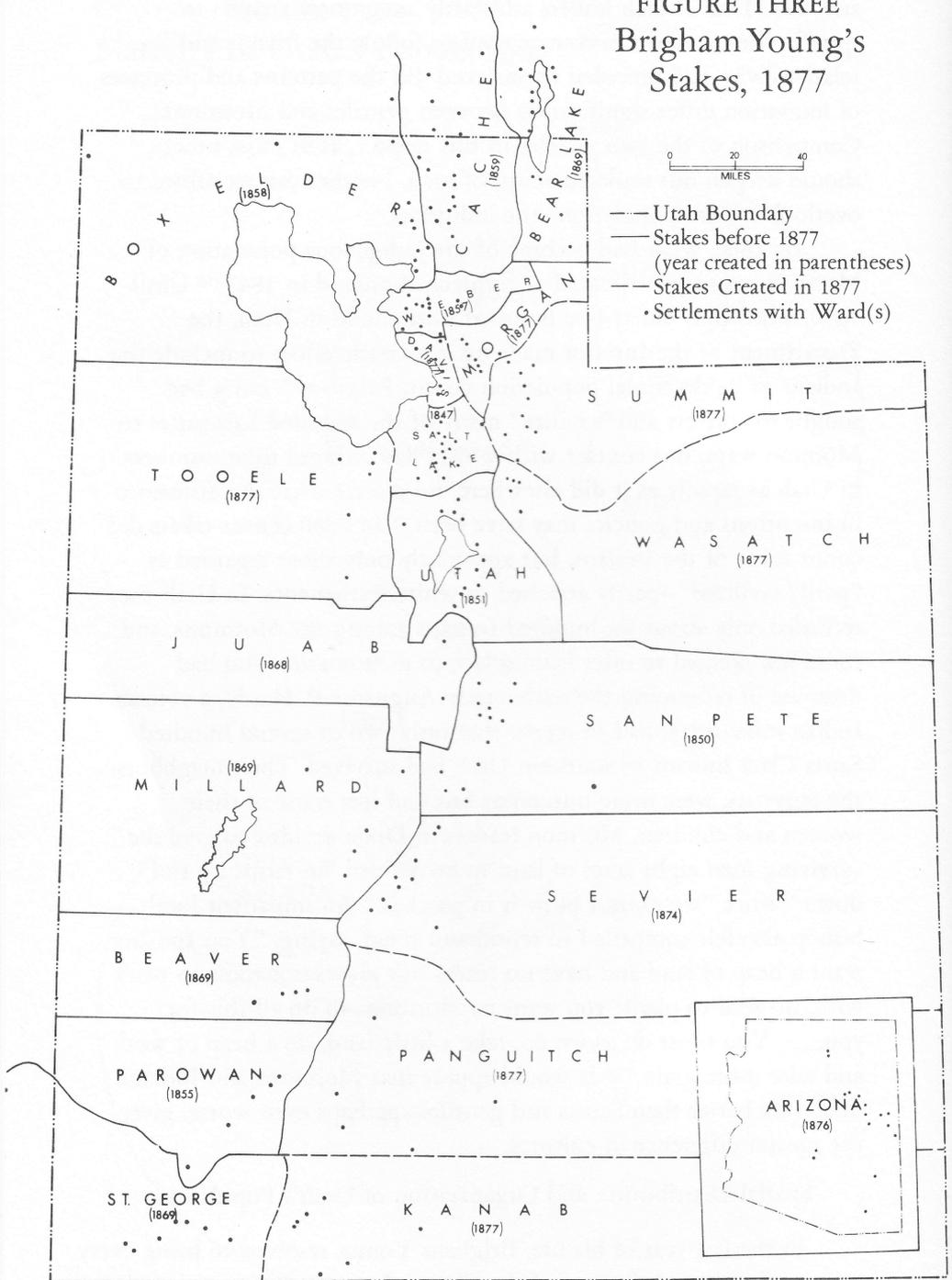
and why. Did Church leaders arbitrarily assign new arrivals to specific sites, or did newcomers tend to follow the friends and relatives who had preceded them? And did the patterns and processes of migration differ significantly between gentiles and Mormons? Comparison of the two peoples in this respect, as in most others, should deepen our understanding of each. Neither can we afford to overlook a third population—the indigenes.

By 1880, what had become of the indigenous population of Mormon country, estimated at eighteen thousand in 1847?¹⁶ Until 1890, when only thirty-five hundred were found in Utah, the Department of the Interior made no systematic effort to include the Indians in its decennial population count. Brigham Young had sought to convert and “civilize” many of the so-called Lamanites to Mormon ways, but contact with whites had reduced their numbers in Utah as rapidly as it did elsewhere, no matter what the difference in intentions and policies may have been.¹⁷ In 1880 census-takers did count some of the Indians, but apparently only those regarded as “partly civilized”—partly attached to white settlements. In Utah they recorded only about six hundred Indians among the Mormons, and those few seemed to offer little solace to missionaries who had dreamed of redeeming the native race. Augustus P. Hardy, a veteran Indian missionary, had to report that only two of several hundred Santa Clara Indians in southern Utah had survived. Their neighbors, the Shivwits, were more numerous but had lost most of their women and children. Mormon leaders in Dixie decided to give the surviving men eight acres of land to be divided “in strips up and down,” since “we cannot plow it in patches.” An impatient local bishop also felt compelled to reprimand them, saying, “You Indians want a heap of land and have no teams nor plows nor tools to work with, no seed to plant; you want us Mormons to do all this for you. . . . You must do as we do, take a little land, do a heap of work and raise more grain.”¹⁸ It would appear that Mormons and Indians mixed no better than Saints and gentiles—perhaps even worse, given the greater difference in cultures.

Spatial Distribution and Organization of Utah’s Population

In the last year of his life, Brigham Young resolved to bring every Saint under closer influence of the Church by reorganizing the entire 9

FIGURE THREE
Brigham Young's
Stakes, 1877



0 20 40
MILES

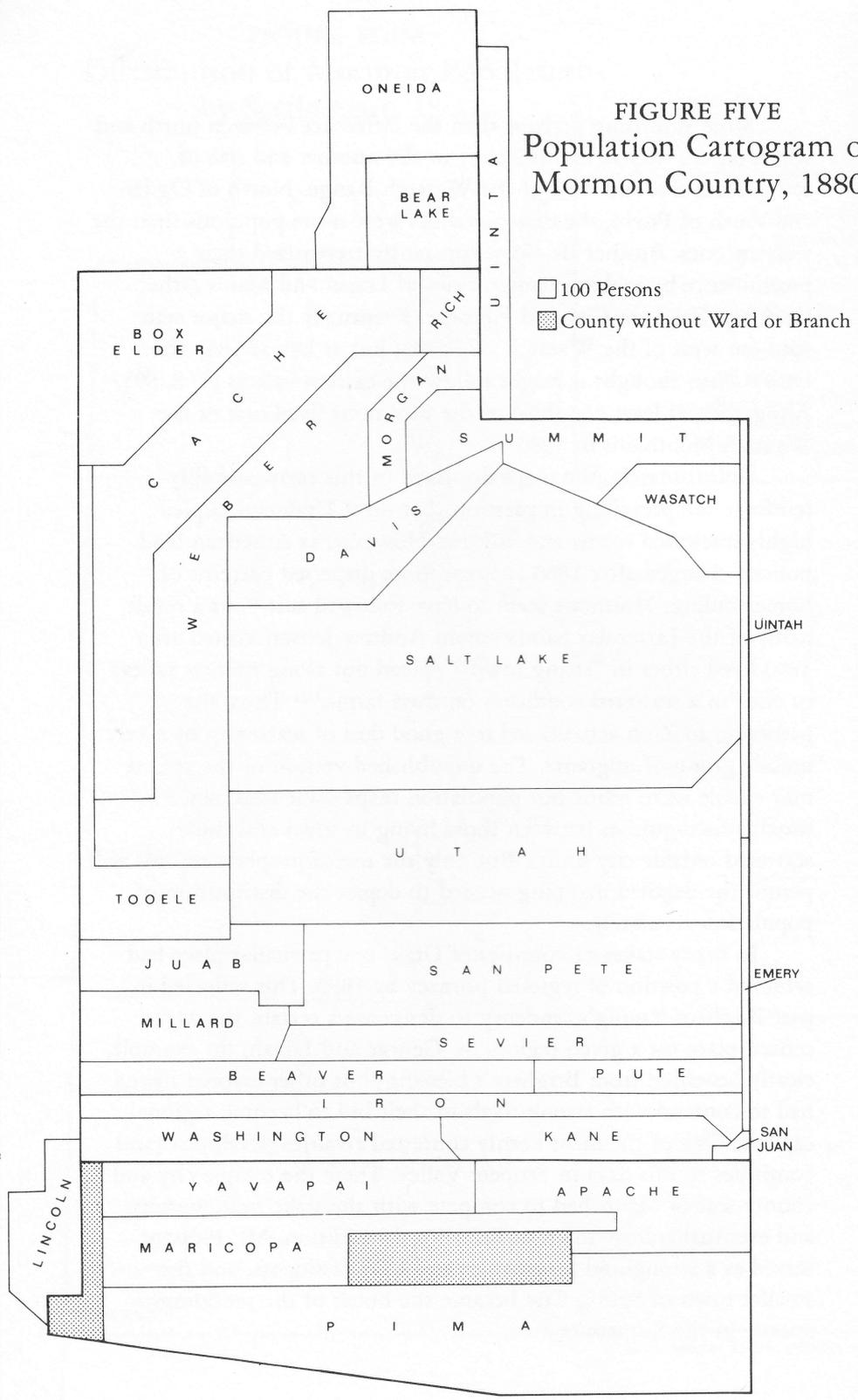
- Utah Boundary
- Stakes before 1877
(year created in parentheses)
- Stakes Created in 1877
- Settlements with Ward(s)

More surprising perhaps than the difference between north and south on the map is the similarity in the number and size of settlements east and west of the Wasatch Range. North of Ogden and south of Provo, the eastern valleys were more populous than the western ones. Brother Brigham apparently recognized their preeminence by making temple cities of Logan and Manti rather than, say, Brigham City and Fillmore. Eventually the major state road ran west of the Wasatch (U.S. 91), but as late as 1863 the *Deseret News* thought it might follow the eastern valleys (U.S. 89).²¹ Altogether, at least one-third of the Mormons lived east of the Wasatch Mountains in 1880.

Unfortunately, the maps displayed in this essay probably reinforce the prevailing impression that most Utahns occupied highly nucleated towns and villages. However, as American land policies changed after 1860 to favor more dispersed patterns of homesteading, Mormons seem to have followed suit.²² As a result, many of the Latter-day Saints whom Andrew Jenson visited after 1890 lived either in "string towns" spread out along narrow valleys or else "in a scattered condition on their farms."²³ Thus, the gathering to Zion actually led to a good deal of scattering by a very mobile group of migrants. The unpublished version of the census may enable us to refine our population maps somewhat, since it usually distinguishes between those living in town and those scattered outside city limits. But only the use of property records will permit the detailed mapping needed to depict the distribution of population accurately.

In many stakes or counties of Utah, one particular place had achieved a position of regional primacy by 1880. This reflected in part Brigham Young's tendency to designate a certain site as *the* central place for a given region. St. George and Logan, for example, clearly benefited from Brigham's blessing; but other favored towns had to contend with strong rivals in their bid to become regional capitals. One of the most keenly contested rivalries developed (and continues to this day) in Sanpete Valley. There the temple city and county seat of Manti had to compete with the stake headquarters and eventual college town of Ephraim. In addition, Mt. Pleasant served as a stronghold for gentiles and LDS dissidents, and the smaller town of Spring City became the home of the presiding apostle in the Sanpete region.

FIGURE FIVE
Population Cartogram of
Mormon Country, 1880

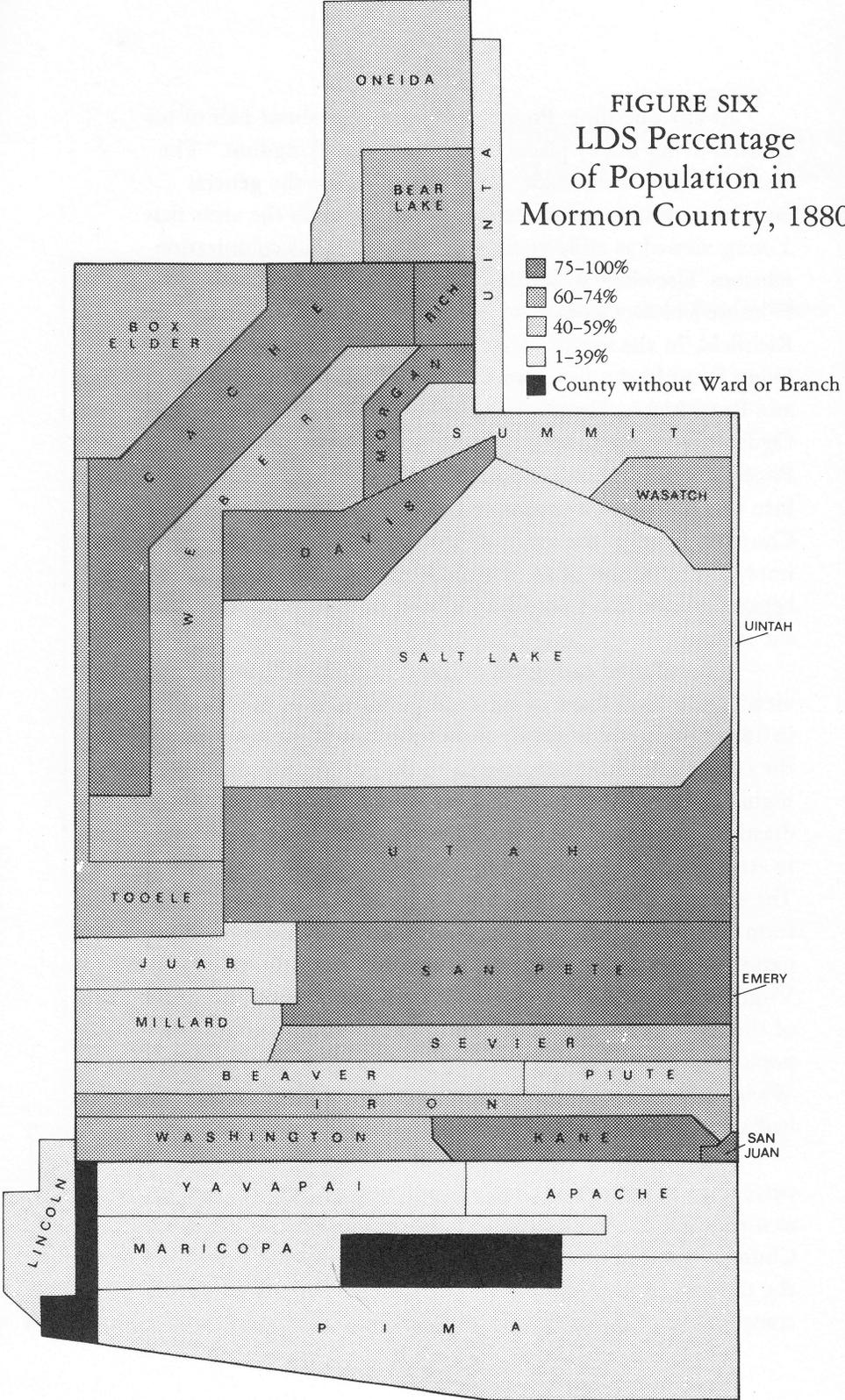


At any one time, President Young kept about half of his apostles living in key places throughout the "kingdom." The distribution of their residences seems to reflect the general population geography of the realm and indicates the areas that Young viewed as most vital to the success of his colonization schemes. Elsewhere in southern Utah he assigned apostles to Fillmore and St. George and, for shorter periods, to Cedar City and Richfield. In the north, outside of Salt Lake City, he had apostles living for at least a few years in Provo, Ogden, Logan, Brigham City, and Paris, Idaho. The transfer of Elder Franklin D. Richards to Ogden occurred just before it became a key station along the Union Pacific line across Utah. Apparently the impending influx of gentiles into this junction city prompted an action intended to strengthen Church control of the area's affairs. All of these special assignments imply the operation of an intermediate, if unofficial, regional level between the territory (or Church headquarters in Salt Lake City) and the stakes.

A population cartogram (Figure 5) offers still another way of viewing the areal shape of the total population of Mormon country in 1880. This graphic simply makes the size of the unit—in this case the county—directly proportional to that of the population. The highly uneven distribution of Utah's population necessitates rather drastic distortion of the counties' boundaries, but the map does serve to reinforce some of the patterns portrayed on the preceding figures. The eastern tier of counties, not yet recognized as stakes in 1880, form a very thin line, pointing up the generally empty and neglected nature of Colorado River country (except along the valleys of the Virgin and Little Colorado rivers). Even counties on the western side of the territory lagged far behind the north-central counties in population size. The four counties that today define the dominant Wasatch Front (with nearly eighty percent of the state's population) had about forty-five percent of all Utahns a hundred years ago.

This cartogram also can serve as a base map of the LDS percentage by county of Utah's population in 1880 (Figure 6). Then, as now, close to three-quarters of the people were affiliated with the Church. The map reveals a highly variable percentage dispersed over the territory in no easily discernible pattern. Only if we could compare Figure 6 closely with the distribution of mines and railroad

FIGURE SIX
 LDS Percentage
 of Population in
 Mormon Country, 1880



lines could we begin to understand the spatial patterns of the two peoples relative to each other. "Had ores not been easily smelted [and transported], Utah would still be Mormon only—or so Marcus Jones concluded in 1891.²⁴ The importance of Salt Lake as the central valley, for gentiles as well as Mormons, becomes clear from the cartograms. Both the city and the rest of the county (then called "the country") had the same two-to-one Mormon-gentile ratio that gave non-Mormons more influence at the center than in most counties of Utah.

No one concerned himself more with the geography of the gentiles than the Great Colonizer, Brigham Young. Whenever he sensed outside settlers approaching or crossing Zion's borders, he often countered by planting more colonies of his own nearby. In the early 1860s, for example, he sent colonists into southern Nevada and southern Idaho to ward off General Patrick E. Connor's soldier-miners. When Connor invited the apostate Morrisites to settle at Soda Springs in 1870, Young responded by sending a band of active Mormons to the same site. For a while after the Utah War of 1857–58, he seemed hesitant to extend Zion much beyond Utah's boundaries; but in the 1870s many Mormon wards sprang up in distant gentile valleys, particularly in Arizona where a southern transcontinental railroad was anticipated.²⁵

Brigham Young's successors very consciously continued this outward thrust of an "imperial Zion" in almost all directions, so that "every available place might be taken to settle in the interest of Utah" in the sense of "give us room that we may dwell." "We are an aggressive people," conceded Elder Erastus Snow of the Twelve Apostles. "We are doing it by purchase—as we approach the gates of our enemies we buy them out, buy out their ranches, their little settlements."²⁶ A decade later (1891) another apostle aptly summarized the aggressive Saints' assessment of their geographical situation:

We have come here to stay . . . I do not see how we are going to be ousted. We are going to take root on the tops of these [Wasatch] mountains and spread out. We are spreading out on the north and the south, and are running over the borders of the United States into Mexico and Canada; and on the east we are spreading out into Wyoming and Colorado; and on the west we would spread out into

that desert a little more if it were not that we would be eaten out by taxes in that poor little sagebrush state.²⁷

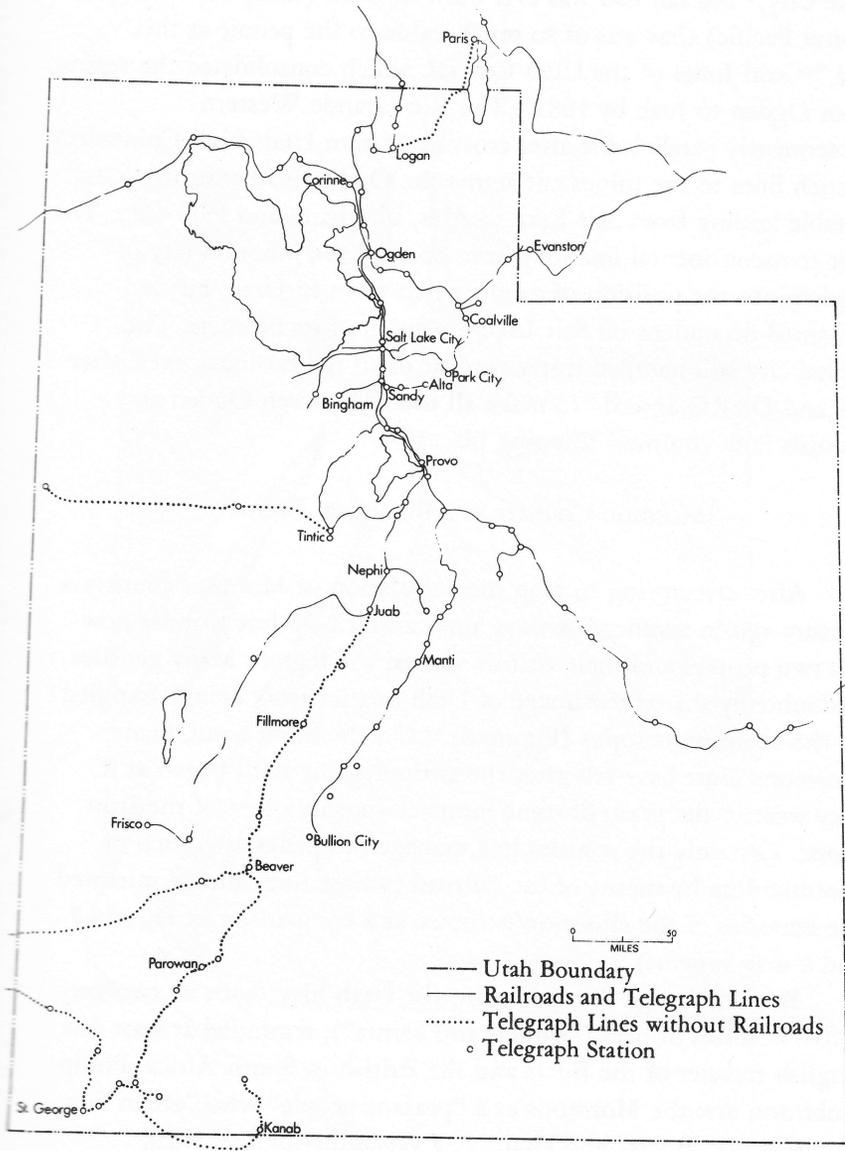
Stretching out the borders of Zion naturally involved "extending the cords of Zion," to use Old Testament terminology as the Latter-day Saints were wont to do. Organization of the Great Basin kingdom into wards, stakes, and regions required spatial linkages between these geographic areas. From the very start, road building formed an integral part of the settlement process; and it remained important even with the advent of the railroad and the increasing influx of gentiles after 1869. Since the two peoples needed an adequate road network, Jones could report by 1890:

Now there are fair roads in all parts of Utah. . . . The highway system . . . is composed of a great road running along the western side of the Wasatch Mountains from Salt Lake City north . . . and south . . . a distance of several hundred miles. From this [state road] there branch off innumerable roads to all the settlements, up every cañon where there is wood or coal to haul or ores to mine.²⁸

President Young found his own frequent travels on Utah's wagon roads invigorating but enervating. He therefore welcomed the nineteenth century's innovations in transportation and communication technology to further the settlement and development of the territory. As Arrington has shown,²⁹ Young first took advantage of the telegraph and tied many towns to it as rapidly as possible, from St. George in the deep south to Paris in the far north (Figure 7). The railroad arrived soon thereafter and, under Mormon influence, largely paralleled the Deseret Telegraph network—but only in northern Utah. Under gentile control in the southern part of the territory, rail lines followed new routes, mainly to the most promising mines. Along these lines the telegraph generally followed until, in about 1890, most of the settled sections of Utah were connected by railroad and/or telegraph.

Ironically, in spite of Brigham Young's apparent preoccupation with extending settlements southward,³⁰ both the Union Pacific and the Denver & Rio Grande bypassed the through-state road south of Nephi in favor of mines along the lower and upper reaches of the Sevier River. Iron County and Dixie combined had insufficient

FIGURE SEVEN
 Utah's Railroad and Telegraph
 Networks, ca. 1890



regions bypassed by the railroad became the most isolated sections of Utah and perhaps therefore remained most like nineteenth-century Mormondom, at least until the advent of the automobile.³¹

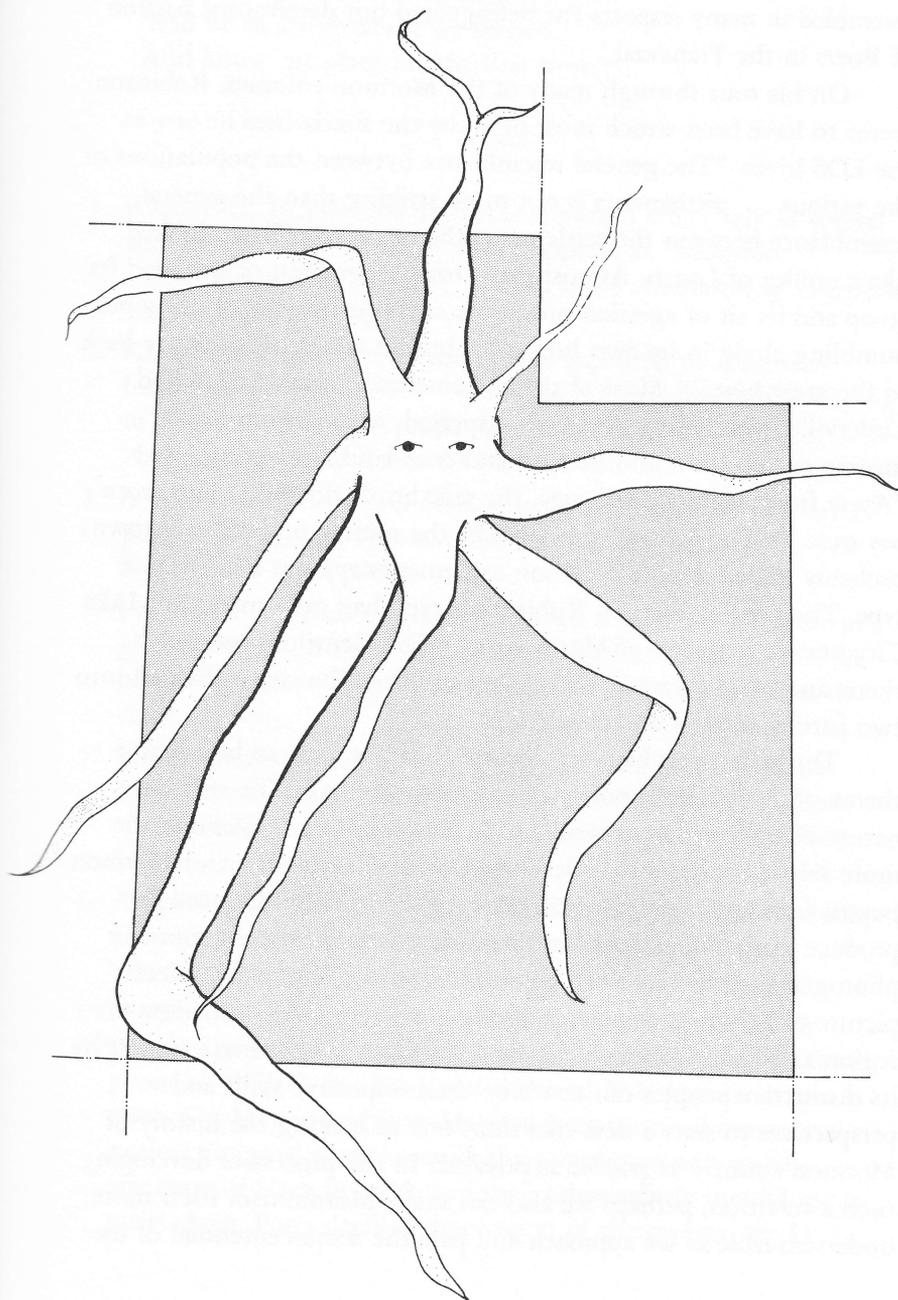
In northern Utah the railroad more fully defined the line of the Wasatch Front and even reinforced the territorial primacy of Salt Lake City. "No railroad was ever built in Utah (except for the Union Pacific) that was of so much value to the people as this one,"³² said Jones of the Utah Central, which consolidated the region from Ogden to Juab by 1881. (The Rio Grande Western subsequently paralleled it after crossing eastern Utah from Colorado.) Branch lines to the mines cut across the Ogden-Juab axis, the most notable leading from Salt Lake to Alta, Bingham, and Park City. The first transcontinental line may have boosted the junction city of Ogden into the position of number-two town in Utah, but it remained dependent on Salt Lake for much of its business. The capital city still handled thirty percent of all rail business, even after UP and D&RG agreed "to make all towns between Ogden and Spanish Fork common shipping places."³³

Mormon Country as a Bicultural Beehive

After attempting to map the population of Mormon country a century ago in a variety of ways, one cannot help but wonder how the two peoples and their visitors viewed the region. Many gentiles undoubtedly shared the image of Utah as a territory being strangled by the Mormon octopus (Figure 8).³⁴ On the other hand, many Mormons must have felt after the antipolygamy raids began as if they were in the grasp of some monster—possibly that of the Iron Horse. Certainly the gentiles had managed to penetrate much of Mormondom by means of the railroad (whose lines almost mirrored the tentacles of the all-seeing octopus, as a comparison of Figures 7 and 8 may suggest).

But, to change the metaphor, the Utah hive, with its two very different kinds of bees ("sinners and Saints"), reminded at least one English traveler of the Boers and the British in South Africa. Philip Robinson saw the Mormons as a "peasant people" who "are in fact very superior 'Boers,' and Utah . . . a very superior Transvaal, strategically."³⁵ Both the Latter-day Saints and the Boers had made a

FIGURE EIGHT
The Gentile View of
Mormondom, 1880



"Great Trek" into the interior of their respective lands at about the same time in order to isolate themselves from fellow countrymen. They subsequently found themselves besieged by nonbelievers in search of minerals. By the 1880s, Brigham Young's people must have resembled in many respects the beleaguered but determined bastion of Boers in the Transvaal.

On his tour through many of the Mormon colonies, Robinson seems to have been struck most of all by the similarities he saw in the LDS hives. "The general resemblance between the populations of the various . . . settlements is not more striking than the general resemblance between the settlements themselves."³⁶ Provo looked like a replica of Logan. Almost every town, regardless of size, had its co-op and its air of agrarian prosperity and equality, "with every bee bumbling along in its own busy way, but all taking their honey back to the same hive."³⁷ Most of the settlements between Logan and Orderville, whether nucleated or dispersed, were surrounded by lucerne or "meadow and orchard and corn-land alternating."³⁸ "Away from Mormon industry, the sage-brush flourishes like green bay-trees."³⁹ The contrast provided by the mining and railroad towns probably helped set the Mormon settlements apart as a distinctive type. The gentile hives, in Robinson's eyes, had even made Salt Lake City unrepresentative of Mormonism. "The Gentile is too much there, and Main Street has too many saloons. The city is divided into two parties, bitterly antagonistic."⁴⁰

The differences between the two peoples seem to be a major theme of most contemporary descriptions of Utah. The striking nature of these differences may have led observers to overlook the more subtle contrasts that developed within the gentile and Mormon populations and their respective domains. We therefore need to produce many more maps (and combine them with contemporary photographs) before we can begin to form a relatively complete picture of Mormon country a hundred years ago. All who view the region as a special place shaped out of a strange new environment by its distinctive peoples can combine their respective skills and perspectives to start a new tradition: one of making the history of Mormon country as *graphic* as possible. In the process of developing such a tradition, perhaps we also can make Mormonism itself more understandable as we approach and pass the sesquicentennial of its

birth. Let us apply T. S. Eliot's lines to the place we call
Mormondom:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁴¹

Notes

1. Richard H. Jackson has used this approach effectively in several studies, the most recent of which appears as "Mormon Perception and Settlement," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 68 (1978):317-34.
2. For a provocative application of this approach to American history in general, see D. W. Meinig, "The Continuous Shaping of America: A Prospectus for Geographers and Historians," *The American Historical Review* 83 (1978):1186-217.
3. A noteworthy exception of this neglect of Mormon country as place is Richard V. Francaviglia, *The Mormon Landscape* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).
4. I am most indebted to Nancy Sessions, a master's candidate in geography at the University of Utah, for her able assistance in preparing and drafting the maps and diagrams included in this essay.
5. The publication after which Merrill K. Ridd and I wish we could afford to model our Mormon atlas is the *Atlas of Early American History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976).
6. Adapted from the description applied to the population of Salt Lake City by Philip S. Robinson in his *Sinners and Saints* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), pp. 66-71.
7. See Dean May, "People on the Mormon Frontier: Kanab's Families of 1874," *Journal of Family History* 1 (1976):177-78, for pyramids of both the Utah and the total U.S. populations in 1880. Dr. May and Melvyn Hammarberg initiated the census project designed to reconstruct the population and social structure of Utah in 1880, and they subsequently invited me to assist them. For a detailed description of the project, see Dr.

Hammarberg's article, "A Sampling Design for Mormon Utah, 1880," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7 (1977):453-76.

8. Sermon by Franklin D. Richards, delivered at a conference held 2 June 1877 in Provo, Utah, as reported by the *Salt Lake City Deseret News* shortly thereafter.
9. Robinson, p. 221.
10. D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy, 1832-1932: An American Elite" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1976).
11. *Deseret News*, 10 March 1892. In the early 1890s, Andrew Jenson set out to visit every settlement of Mormondom in search of records that he could use to compile a history of the LDS church. On many of his trips he filed descriptions of the places he visited with the *Deseret News*; these accounts also appear in his manuscript histories of the stakes.
12. See the St. George Stake Statistical Reports submitted to the Presiding Bishopric in 1877, on microfilm in the LDS Church Archives Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Hereinafter referred to as Church Archives.) On the standard form for each ward, Bleak inserted separate columns to note the number of plural families.
13. Davis Bitton, "Mormon Polygamy: A Review Article," *Journal of Mormon History* 4 (1977):101-18, appraises the literature pertaining to the practice of plural marriage. However, no one has yet sorted out all of the possible ways in which one could calculate a given population's participation in polygamy.
14. William A. Bowen, a geographer at California State University, Northridge, has computerized the data contained in the 1850 Utah census (which actually was not ended until 1851) and given a copy of the printouts to the Genealogical Society of Utah Library in Salt Lake City. Eventually he hopes to analyze Utah's pioneer population in much the same way that he has examined the *Willamette Valley: Migration and Settlement on the Oregon Frontier* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978).
15. D. Michael Quinn, "Organizational Development and Social Origins of the Mormon Hierarchy, 1832-1932: A Prosopographical Study" (Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1973), ch. 3.
16. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Mormons and Their Great Basin Kingdom," paper presented as the keynote address at the annual

convention of the Association of American Geographers, Salt Lake City, 24 April 1977.

17. To what extent Latter-day Saint treatment of the Indians differed from that of other whites remains a subject of debate even among Mormon scholars. Compare, for example, Howard A. Christy, "Open Hand and Mailed Fist: Mormon-Indian Relations in Utah, 1847-52," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 46 (1978):216-35, and Lawrence Coates, "Brigham Young and Mormon Indian Policies: The Formative Period, 1836-51," *BYU Studies* 18 (1978):428-52.
18. Taken from a directive to the Indians issued by the presiding bishop of St. George, 24 March 1879; St. George Stake Manuscript History, Church Archives.
19. James R. Clark (comp.), *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-66), 2:283-95. Dated 11 July 1877, this circular describes some of Brigham Young's motives for effecting this reorganization. The dates shown on the map for the creation of stakes should be taken as approximate, given the informal nature of the unit and usage of the term before 1877.
20. Robinson, pp. 132, 261.
21. *Deseret News*, 10 June 1863.
22. The descriptions of Mormon settlements found in the stake manuscript histories support the thesis of a threefold sequence of agricultural landscapes in Utah—village, homestead, and dry farming—presented by Charles S. Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape," in *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, ed. Richard H. Jackson (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), pp. 91-106.
23. This particular example applied to most of the families in Deseret (a town reestablished in 1874 in Millard County), according to the report Jenson filed with the *Deseret News*, 2 June 1893. But he frequently described newer settlements in similar terms.
24. Marcus E. Jones was a botanist-geologist who prepared the "Utah" section of the Treasury Department's *Report on the Internal Commerce of the United States for the Year 1890* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), p. 886. 25

25. For the pattern in Arizona, see Charles S. Peterson, *Take Up Your Mission: Mormon Colonization along the Little Colorado River, 1870-1900* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1973).
26. *A Full Report of the Fiftieth Annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6-8 April 1880* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1880), p. 58.
27. From an address by Elder Joseph F. Smith, delivered at a Relief Society conference in Ogden, 17 December 1891; Weber Stake Manuscript History, Church Archives.
28. Jones, p. 848.
29. Leonard J. Arrington, "The Deseret Telegraph—A Church-owned Utility," *Journal of Economic History* 11 (1951):117-39.
30. Jackson, "Mormon Perception and Settlement," pp. 326-30.
31. This pattern seems to reinforce the view that the real heartland of Mormon culture lies in rural—particularly southern—Utah. See Charles S. Peterson, "A Mormon Town: One Man's West," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976):3-12.
32. Jones, p. 854.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 863.
34. This map was inspired by an 1898 broadside entitled "The Mormon Octopus" and aimed at the seating of polygamist B. H. Roberts as Utah's representative in Congress. A copy of the attack (with a map of the U.S. that features an octopus centered on Utah) appears in T. Edgar Lyon, "Evangelical Protestant Missionary Activities in Mormon-Dominated Areas, 1865-1900" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1962), p. 213.
35. Robinson, pp. 95, 100.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
41. T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding," pt. 5, from "Four Quartets," in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1952), p. 145.

The Chiaroscuro of Poetry

Emma Lou Thayne

From a lifetime of activity as a Church worker, teacher, and housewife, Emma Lou Thayne argues that the LDS community has suffered because of the tendency to make poetry and the humanities the hammer and anvil of exhortation rather than the pick and shovel of deeper excavations into the meaning of life. There has been a general tendency to demand the trite or "uplifting" rather than the inquiring or soul-searching.

Many readers will understand that Mrs. Thayne is speaking here of official publications, not of the larger field of LDS literary and cultural endeavors, and that to some extent she has overstated her case. Attempts to deal seriously with important themes can be found in such periodicals as Dialogue, Sunstone, and Exponent II; in plays such as Carol Lynn Pearson's "The Order Is Love," Orson Scott Card's "Father, Mother, Mother, and Mom," and Thomas Rogers's "Huebner"; and in writings of people like Maureen Whipple, Douglas Thayer, and Don Marshall. In addition, the Church has sponsored the work of some very talented artists and writers at Brigham Young University and elsewhere.

The official tendency to downgrade the arts and humanities, however, seems to have been the general trend, and it has had the effect of impoverishing the Mormon people. In the physical sciences and in fields such as law, medicine, and business, complexity and excellence are fostered and tolerated; while fields such as literature, history, political science, philosophy, the theatre, painting, or poetry are valued principally for encouraging the Saints. Contrary to the general assumption, instead of "building faith and testimonies" this tendency may actually have the effect of driving sensitive people from the fold by denying the legitimacy of their religious impulses. Like the well-examined life, poetry, the arts, and the humanities need to be revealed in contrasting shades of gray; only in that way can they honestly reflect the complexity of human existence.

In art there is a technique that uses darkness of different tones to heighten the effect of light; both Rembrandt and Shakespeare used it in their works. Juxtaposed with or superimposed upon darkness, light becomes more radiant than it might have been by itself. This technique effects more than contrast; it allows the light to surge from within as if imbued with ethereal properties that

transcend ordinary conceptions of warmth or brilliance. The technique is called *chiaroscuro*, from the Italian *chiaro*, meaning light, and *oscuro*, or dark. Chiaroscuro—the word itself sounds luminous, edged in gray.

Steven Orson Taylor, about whom I know nothing except that he has published in *Sunstone*, writes:

TO COMPOSE A POEM

To compose a poem
Nothing is more fitting
Than simplicity, but that
Ambiguous simplicity of
Gods who, in exactitude
Of vision, let snow cover
Everything,
So that, in the incredible umber
blue,
And yellow glare of sunset
Beads of ice may drink in fire,
And in wondering at that,
The eye may see the dark
Brown complexity on the
Underside of everything.¹

The dark brown complexity on the underside of everything—this complexity provides the shading for *chiaroscuro*.

Hugh B. Brown loved to quote Will Durant in saying, “No one deserves to believe unless he has served his apprenticeship in doubt.”² But what happens to the poet who is rooted in the Church and yet sees the complexities? Is there room in the world of LDS publications for the creative tension experienced by those on the cutting edge of the arts? And can there be encouragement of the excellence that is inherent only in the creative tension?

What in life does not come edged in dark, especially for the poet? Out of the dark bursts most of our moments of light—a baby born, a storm over, health recovered, a quarrel resolved, belief restored. Yet, among Mormons especially, there is a diffidence, a pale reluctance to deal with the dark that preceded the birth, the clearing,

the healing, the loving, the faith. The charcoal of our unsettling thoughts or feelings is painted out by the fear of appearing faithless or inept or out of tune with the gospel. And much of our poetry—at least much of that published in the official publications of the Church—will never be as good as it might be until we somehow learn to allow on paper the getting acquainted with those grays in ourselves and in each other.

This development will take as much time as will the altering of attitude in those who encourage or discourage by selection. It will be just as slow as our coming to claim the privilege of writing simply because it is legitimate to try—without justification, without pretending that what we have to offer will be a great missionary tool or will form one more piece in an image of solidarity and purity. We need to feel free to write unfettered by nineteenth-century poetic devices or Victorian suspicions or a need to have everything painted in only rosy glow. Since we tend publicly to put little value on private encounter, many of us who live by examining the complexities are too often apologetic about them, and especially about those within ourselves. But we cannot afford to be, for these complexities are the very fodder of whatever poems there are to write.

Theodore Roethke says that “poems that praise God must create the belief that God also believes in the writer of the poem.”³ So must the writer. But oh, it is hard to believe in ourselves, to feel worthy to take the time to be anything beyond the usual expectations of our surroundings, which, goodness knows, are complicated if not complex.

While preparing this paper I was rummaging about and found a letter—a note, really—that I wrote to my mother over ten years ago.

Wednesday, January 5, 1967
Under the Dryer

Dear Mother—

What a trial it must be to have a “going, going, gone” daughter! And how seldom you are told by her that you are a valuable—nay, indispensable—part of her life.

Do you know, little dearie, how much I really value the things you have given me, both by means of heredity and environment? It is you who have bequeathed me a head that won't stop churning and a delight in seeing things accomplished. It is your love of beauty and

new ideas that has stirred me to crave these things. It is your feeling for the good in people and your appreciation of them that drives me to seek their companionship—whether at home or church or in the classroom or on the tennis court. It is you who have taught me the satisfaction of creativity and the boredom of indolence.

You, Mother, have given me my need to say thank you to Father in Heaven for all that is mine—by loving and clinging to the days that he has given me—by filling them with “doing.”

Please know how much I appreciate you and these things you have willed me—and please understand that I must use them—perhaps not too wisely—but fully.

I love you—
your little Megan—grown up.

P.S. I sit now looking at my new class of 23 eager freshmen and watch them in real concentration for 50 minutes of their busy lives—and I can hardly wait to see what new notions can be siphoned into those heads—and what new things they will in turn donate to mine. Forgive me for liking this so much.

But you see—I don’t like other things less because of it. Today I ironed a blouse for Becky, sewed on a button for Dinny, listened to Rinda practice, made Shelley finish her eggnog, cuddled Meg when she cried—and sat proudly while Mel gave a talk we’d planned together. I visited my “poetry pal” and got more encouragement, planned a match in the parent-child, and arranged to go to the symphony with our good friends. I even talked to my mother. And I loved all of it. Please try to understand. (I even had fun leaving a clean house, and expect to enjoy fixing a tasty dinner!)

What an appalling apology it makes, this justification—even if honest—for the complexity of mere *activity*! What then, of the complexity of *response* to that activity? The editors of poetry deemed acceptable to the Mormon audience are scarcely eager to look at all that complexity. What kind of examination of it *is* encouraged? Who owns the artist? Where is the place of the humanist? Too many look at the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities with a skepticism about quality, a disdain for “intellectualism” and expertise, and a suspicion of chiaroscuro that all too often relegate the excellent to obscurity and lift the mediocre to prominence.

Take, for example, one of the most common experiences of Mormonism—the mission. Lance Owens, in the current issue of *Exponent II*, gives an elder’s realistic view:

Seldom in life are so many searing forces focused upon one soul at one time as they are in the years of a Mormon mission. Few fields

offer Mormon literature greater promise of dramatic fruits, and fewer still prove so difficult to harvest. The cliches and traditions, the pulpit paeans, the blur of tearful farewells and inspirational homecomings have engineered a formidable barrier between the common image and the painful, occasionally shattering, personal reality of "the mission."⁴

Yet what is heard from the pulpit or read in the magazines or pointed up in the manuals about the mission experience? One of the best poet/critics of this decade, T. S. Eliot, maintains that "most religious poems say not *how* they feel, but how they *want* to feel."⁵ What does this suggest about material used by the far less discriminating? A nineteen-year-old stands at the pulpit addressing the largest crowd he has ever faced. It is his farewell moment in his ward and he wants to secure his place in the memories of his family, his girl friend, his teachers, his buddies. To assure his being remembered well, he reads a poem:

GOD'S WILL FOR US

Just to be tender, just to be true;
Just to be glad the whole day through;
Just to be merciful, just to be mild;
Just to be trustful as a child;
Just to be gentle and kind and sweet;
Just to be helpful with willing feet;
Just to be cheery when things go wrong;
Just to drive sadness away with a song;
Whether the hour is dark or bright;
Just to be loyal to God and right;
Just to believe that God knows best;
Just in His promise ever to rest;
Just to let love be our daily key;
This is God's will, for you and me.

[Anonymous]

This is, of course, an exaggeration; but hyperbole may say what real examples could only suggest. Such resortings to the poetic passage can be found at funerals, in Relief Society, in two-and-one-half-minute talks, in familiar variety everywhere—to dramatize girding up

and settling down, epiphany and exhortation, brotherhood and good deeding, joy and sorrow. Few meetings can claim immunity. And who are the creators of so much of this poetic nonsense? Writers who know better and can do better. The question does not seem to be whether or not the talent is somewhere in the Church, but whether it is used and how. Who among us has not penned such a poem for such an occasion—some conciliatory, condescending verse that is as easy to write as it is hard to condone?

FOR FATHER'S DAY

Hardly a father in Monument Park
Has failed in his day to go in the dark
To comfort a baby whose kith and kin
Are somehow and somewhere related to him.
And hardly a baby, now grown or not
Will fail to remember how when just a tot
He or she was cuddled or coddled,
Changed and fed—spooned or bottled—
By some hairy beast with a whiskery cheek
Who managed to manage—to sing or to speak—
To tell in a story or scripture or way
That he did things—the truths that
his conscience would say.

[my own, of course]

And I have loved John Harris's:

BLESS OUR TACKY CHAPEL

In subdivision you can search
For our pre-fabricated church—
Asphalt roofing, plywood walls,
Nylon carpet in the halls.
Bless the pulpit made of beech,
With clock therein for timing speech,
And Lennox air conditioners
For cooling down parishioners.
Best Crane plumbing in the johns,
Astroturf in all the lawns . . .

Of course, it is fun to play with words. There is something in the human being that needs to decorate—to put words into fixed form and to immortalize the moment in verse. Readers like to clatter along to a regular pattern of accents; that is why it is easier to memorize a page of poetry than one of prose. Something about the compression, the rhythm, the fulfillment of expectation makes a passage in poetry different from the same idea in prose. And just as in any game, writers like to impose rules to increase the challenge. Light verse is necessary for light occasions, but since it is so easy to celebrate the light it sometimes becomes too easy to try the same techniques on the serious. But there is more to life than “Skip to My Lou” and more to poetry than rhythm and rhyme. Somehow, a rhyme such as “Death is here, Death is there,/Death is with us everywhere” does not accomplish the end of poetry. Between the page, the ear, and the heart there must be a combining of words, sounds, and images that fit the intended meaning and tone of a piece; form and content must suit each other.

For example, there have been many efforts to modernize the antique prose-poetry of the Bible—but in the process, something happens to more than the words. Paul, in the King James version, says: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.” In the *Living Bible*, modernized by Kenneth Taylor for his ten children, the passage reads: “If I had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them, and could speak every language there is in all of heaven and earth, but didn’t love others, I would only be making noise.”⁶ The jarring has to be more than the dull thud of the prosaic; when language is changed, meaning is changed.

The appreciation of poetry goes beyond simple enjoyment of the reduction of language to its most crystallized form. What is unsaid can be the most important thing that poetry says. “It is the labor,” as Archibald MacLeish puts it, “which undertakes to ‘know’ the world not by exegesis or demonstration or proofs but directly, as a man knows an apple in the mouth.”⁷ If the form of a poem is good, it is complexity made simple by imagery and clear by subtlety. It is the leaping of the chasm, the catching on to the joke, the understanding of the ineffable. And if it is good, it will, like an

apple, be a new experience each time, tangy with fresh juices and succulent with suggestion.

But it all must begin, as Ezra Pound demands, "with an escape from dullness"⁸—and, unfortunately, much that is milled by Mormon outlets is predigested noncomplexity, metered moralizing, light verse turned sober, the dulled edge, chiaroscuro dimmed to rosy glow. Emphasis is on the didactic, on the pragmatic, on the function, on the uplift that celebrates mediocrity. And it is usually not the fault of the editors—nor of the artists, who sometimes supply astoundingly good material for the choosing. But all too often, from a batch of poems by a good poet, the least good poem will be the one chosen for Church publication. We are held back by some set of notions about art that establishes standards well below our collective capability. Thus, complexities too often go unexamined in the blithe explaining of the joke and restating of the expected.

As another example—and I continue to use my own writings since I can be brutal with them and since I also know why they were written and how—here are two versions of the same response to an experience: that of having a daughter married and gone.

TO A DAUGHTER, 21, GONE AWAY

She ran the days through between quick fingers.
And as she grew she learned to linger

Only where beauty dappled or lit or strewed
itself across the craggy map of calendars. Few
mornings came without her jaunty touch and tune,
and fewer nights blurred dusk unnoticed in her room.

Our lives made contact like sky and clouds, hers
tracing lively tracks on ours to stir

any sameness of our days to froth and thunder.
Now that she's gone away, is it any wonder

we say a new prayer to bless the beauty
that is anywhere she is, and the sweet fruit

she left to stay unblemished by the stray
hands of time? Some mornings, though, I say

An echo is not enough. In my hungry mind
I seek a buffer for the distance. Kind

Father, help. Let me remember why
she came at all, set, timed to lace our sky
with elegant relief. Please bless and give me
strength to see the grief of loss not actually
so taking as suspending. Somewhere new
I know, she lends her brush to skies almost in view.

That piece was stuffed into my burgeoning file labeled Bad
Poems; it was labeled Very Bad. What I wanted to say was this:

AFTERMATH

It is the slow putting back
that disarranges the calm.
At this time yesterday
the whole place ran with fixing up.
All of us courtiers to the proceedings
that precede events
like birth or death
or marriage.

Even the dog was left home.
Men came away from offices.
Aunts and cousins flustered
hors d'oeuvres and practices into place.

Musicians sounded their wares
and small boys made tracks in the ice cream.

She (in my dress now twenty-six years yellow)
and her fit groom
stood in the splendid grass
and grew smiles
as long as they could
before he came pounding on the door
where she had gone to change her seasons:

Crashes occurred in my silence.
Goodbye hands reached for her,
and wearing his cowboy hat
he was way above anyone
past permission.

With their destinations written in their quick soles,
she hurried to throw her bouquet of stories
into her cousins below.

The ten-year-old almost had it.
But that would not have been right.
It takes more distance
for even the nearest of kin
to snatch the pain of the innocent.

They hardly watched the flocks of words
lighting them off.

And now they have gone,
all of them:

Into the wilds the pair.
Back to watering lawns with fences of sand
and vanishing into broken mirrors the others.

In this cool place of wilting names and baby's breath
I am putting her slip
into the laundry bag
and eating white frosted cake
as I vacuum
up the blanks and wonder where they go.

I am not suggesting that the poetry of the complexities need itself be complex, incomprehensible, or excessive. The primary aim of the poet must be to share—but to share all of it, not just simplistic formulas. Pablo Neruda, whose poetry was happily noted in this year's cultural refinement lesson on Chile, states that there must be the "honorable misfortunes, lone victories, splendid defeats." People must be allowed to "feel at home in the dignity without which it is impossible for them to be complete human beings." This is what religious poetry must express: the recognition that there is "no such thing as a lone struggle—or lone hope," that together we share a "splendid multiplicity" in our "unrelenting human occupations."⁹

The celebration of the human spirit and the worship of God are complex phenomena. Any serious Mormon poet needs to be seriously about the business of both of them. Eliot again says, "It is hard to find a man who is both a good poet and possessing deep religious convictions."¹⁰ I do not believe that this is true; I know and have known of many who are both. And the deep religious convictions of the good poet come out as a by-product of believing, out of the experience of believing, not of trying to believe on paper. Believing can be in many things, as concrete as they are ineffable. *Spiritual* means enlivening, that which brings to life. That which is spiritual is not confined to labeled places or to programmed activities any more than inspiration is locked into a system or a time schedule. Deep religious convictions will find their way into the good poem, because what is espoused is affirmed in the writing of the honest person. The principled poet is the good poet who can be better because of fasting and prayer. I have always believed that the real muse is the Holy Ghost. But this does not mean that the poet can sit down, thinking, "I will now write a great religious poem"—this usually results in a pulpit paean. It does mean, however, that the good poet who is also of deep religious conviction will re-create experience without compromise, dealing honestly with all the multiplicities, in order to illuminate a real exchange and to let the particular explode into the universal.

Honest writing does not mean moroseness or confessional emotionalism, or sniping at life; rather, it means seeing and growing from taking an honest look. Visions can be captured; apples can be tasted; moments can be given permanent form. But there has to be the willingness to let honesty prevail—and to let the best poetry be *read*. Our lives are mixtures of light and dark; and while it is ultimately enriching to celebrate the light, to celebrate the light to the exclusion of the dark—as if darkness does not, or should not, exist—is to misrepresent, and perhaps to bring guilt and misery to those readers whose lives tell them otherwise.

Why do we indulge this misrepresentation and its insubstantial poetry in the Church? In places that count, ostensibly much more is expected. President Spencer W. Kimball's much-quoted exhortation

from the July 1977 issue of the *Ensign*—the special issue on the arts—states:

The story of Mormonism has never been written. . . . It remains for inspired hearts and talented fingers *yet* to reveal themselves. [These artists] must be faithful, inspired, active Church members to give life and feeling and true perspective to a subject so worthy. Our own talent, obsessed with dynamism from a cause, could put into such a story life and heartbeats.¹¹

But that story can never be told in whitewash—in platitudes or generalities or simplistic pablum. It can be told only with honest specifics from real lives.

Robert Frost asked, "How are we to write the Russian novel in America as long as life goes so unterribly?"¹² And it may have been this question that Eugene England was answering when he said in a recent issue of *Dialogue*: "Many have said that Mormonism answers so well so many basic questions and provides such a satisfying way of life for most of its people that there is not sufficient tension or tragedy. What I finally clearly realized is that there is no need to apologize. Religious success is infinitely preferable to literary success."¹³ Is Mormon life so "untterrible?" Is any life so free of tensions and tragedy, so full of answers and of satisfying ways of doing and being, that there is no sufficient material for literary success as well as religious success? And if our lives *are* free of the terrible wants of physical deprivation and theological impoverishment, are our turmoils eliminated as we confront ourselves and our abilities to relate to each other and to God, whose marvels and truths can seem as elusive at one moment as they are apparent at another?

No; the terrible, tragic, tense complexities for literary material, as well as the "human dynamism" that President Kimball wants for the recording of them, are there in every turn of the eye. We need only be about the recording—supported in this prodigious effort by the acceptance of excellence in those influential quarters that now seem so indifferent to it.

In October of 1977 I stood by the bedside of my Aunt Evalyn Richards. She was dying of cancer; she would have been ninety the next month. From the time I was a little girl she had lavished attention and gifts on me, and not the least of these was the

privilege of seeing her during these last years of her life when she became a virtual recluse, almost blind and deaf enough that conversation was sustained only at a glass-shattering pitch. She had had only one child of her own—a boy born with club feet who had died at age twenty-one—and she and Uncle Willard had taken on my brothers and me to pamper and sustain in brave and unflinching ways.

That Sunday morning my brother Richard and I left the still elegance of her home silenced by a strange inertia. He had given her a blessing; I had held her too-slim hand, unmanicured for the first time in memory; and we both had tried to sift into her sleep some idea of how we loved her. But we were confounded by mammoth intrusions into our sense of reality: Aunt Evalyn's death would make us the "older generation." Not only would we have the concern and obligation of putting together the funeral for this the last of those wondrously impossible aunts and uncles of our dead parents' generation, but we would have to know enough to do it: to put on the funeral and to assume the rights, duties, honors, and fears of being the ones in charge—not only of it, but of life.

In our efforts to assume both responsibilities, we discovered two truths that I must now grapple with. And for me the grappling will have to be done in a surprisingly large part through poetry. The first was finding how little we knew about Aunt Evalyn. She had attended our family parties, of course, and she and Uncle Willard had come to our home for Christmas for eighty years, and they had lived in a cabin in Mt. Air where, between the stream and their front porch, Uncle Willard had concocted a generator at which we lighted our lamps. The pony we children rode had been their son's, the horseshoe pit had been theirs, and Aunt Evalyn always invited us in for hot cross buns with lots of raisins and for birthday parties on Valentine's Day. Though we had never heard her, we knew that she had played the violin as a girl and had studied in Paris. And over the years she had given me things like a play store and "traveling towels" to pack for the trips that I never took until my college years. She had bestowed outrageously generous gifts on all of our growing children at Christmas, for marriages, at births. And once a month or so we had had visits to catch up on the usual happenings of a big family. But as Rick and I and another cousin tried to assemble just the obituary we realized, in the kind of panic that attends having

missed the last train, that Aunt Evalyn was gone—and so were the memories, the details, the light and shadow of a lifetime that would now never be remembered. I scrambled through scrapbooks, tied off some of the ambiguous certainties, and put together a funeral that made me more than sad.

That day, everything real about Aunt Evalyn went into the eternities with her. None of us knew how she had felt about a single thing. We knew what she had *done*—her housekeeper could inform us of the surface data—but there was not one soul who knew a single thought or feeling about that lone woman who went into the earth one Wednesday afternoon in October.

A poem I had written years before came back to assail me. It was about another aunt—my grandmother's sister—who had never married, who died at ninety-five, and about whom I thought I had known intimate marvels. When my mother and I sorted her belongings, I realized how little I knew. I had wanted the poem I wrote to be hers; but even in the first person singular it could be nothing more than my poem *about* her.

NINETY-FIVE

Welcome to my attic,
It's small and crowded
But where I spend me.
No one comes
At least not now.
Why should they?
No one knows my name.
Oh, certainly, that—
Aunt Kate, Miss Stayner.
But not my name.

No one knows a thing.
Who ever saw me dance
or ride the pinto at the Fair
or snitch Brother Brewer's cherries
or catch the street car
or drive an auto before the mayor could
or buy a radio that got New York
or sell twenty-seven ads one month

or hear Myrt and Marge at 9 five nights a week
or be a missionary in Detroit
or sing for Reuben—high C—even him surprised
or make a flowered hat
or get some land to give away
or see Alaska
or watch his buggy disappear behind the dust?
See my boxes full of boxes.
Open them enough
And here I am:
Too far away for anyone
To call me Katherine.¹⁴

It was the absence of her own complexity that shriveled and disembodied Katie—the complexity as seen by those who mattered to her.

I wanted then, as I urgently wanted on that Sunday after Aunt Evalyn's funeral, to capture the essence of that lost relative in a poem—a real one, an honest one that would let me share her particularness, let me be acquainted with her night thoughts and the proddings behind her days and with her dealings with them. That Sunday I wanted to ask, "Aunt Evalyn, why did you leave the Church? What did it do to you to be abandoned by the boy you adopted? Did it help to move when little Willard died? Did you want the blessing Richard gave you at the last? Why did you refuse to play your violin?" And, more than anything, "Aunt Evalyn, who did you look to all those years that you were the older generation? Will I feel this same aloneness for the rest of my life?"

What wisdom could she have lent to my grappling with reality? If I could have created some totally adequate poem, would it have accomplished this lending? Sarah Orne Jewett says in *Country of the Pointed Firs*, "You never get over bein' a child long 's you have a mother to go to"¹⁵—or a father. And, in some less poignant way, an uncle or an aunt—someone from that stage ahead whose beckonings are as ruthlessly certain as they are imperative. And, for most of us, in the absence of the actual, the poetic supplement can provide the informative bridge, the comforting companion, the intuitive answer. Like prayer, an honest poem—that vivid, insightful arc between experience, intellect, heart, and finally soul—can make us feel that we are not alone.

We all know that there are Mormon poets of great talent and integrity. I also know that many of them possess not only the ability but also the willingness to look with candor and conviction and sufficiency at the complexities, and in doing so to heal as they stir and inspire as they sort. What I wonder is how they manage to vend their skills and trust their worth in the Mormon marketplace. Dedication to excellence demands that they do more than grind out metrical editorials; they must sell *themselves* with their product.

But how to sell either when last-century measurements are leveled at this century's credibility? Pablo Neruda, when he accepted the Nobel Prize for literature in 1971, said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I did not learn from books any recipe for writing a poem and I in my turn will avoid giving any advice on mode or style which might give the new poets even a drop of supposed insight. . . . [This] is because in the course of my life I have always found somewhere the necessary affirmation, the formula which lay waiting for me, not to be petrified in my words, but to explain me to myself."¹⁶ And it is this explaining that clarifies us to ourselves and to each other. This involves frightful vulnerability on the part of the poet. Openness—the willingness to be exposed—exacts the price of personal anonymity and its attendant public security. If writing is a process of shedding skins, which it must be, the poet must be willing to stand naked before a critical audience. It demands that the quivering, unadorned self lead the quest for truth.

This is a relatively new concept for the Mormon poet. For a century, Mormon poetry was swathed in the impersonal. Reluctance to allow self even to enter the proceedings was typical of writers such as Eliza R. Snow. Her poems were, and in some ways still can be, regarded as beacons of lyric light on the theology, purpose, trek, and sustaining of Mormonism in the last half of the 1800s and well into our day. But—courageous though she was in other areas—whether writing to or about her brother Lorenzo Snow, to the parents of a child who had died, to the writers of fiction, or to a Father and a Mother in Heaven, Eliza, poet laureate of Zion, never let the personal color her hortatory response to the world and Mormondom. The chiaroscuro was never there. Eliza's only approach to real poetry in her verse occurred not when she lived in the Salt Lake Valley as pampered high priestess to the Church, but in the

Nauvoo exodus days when her life was a rugged tramp through the snows. Typical of her distance not only from self but from reality is the final stanza of her advice to the writers of fiction:

Waste not the gifts that God has given
 To you, on things beneath your care:
But let your genius soar to heaven
 And bask in beams of glory there.¹⁷

In the 270 pages of poems of the first edition of her book *Poems Religious, Historical, and Political*, published in Liverpool in 1856, there is no getting acquainted with Eliza, the woman behind the poet. All we know is that she had an infallible ear for rhythm and rhyme and a vocabulary of superlatives. In writing of the Prophet Joseph Smith, whom she must have adored, her tone and diction could be as applicable to the christening of a ship as to the launching of a spiritual movement by an inspired but human being.

How sweet the joys of conscious innocence:
How peaceful is the calm within the breast,
When conscience speaks in approbative tones
Softer than notes that swell the harpsichord,
And testifies within, that *all is well*.
With what a noble, heavenly feeling does
The bosom swell; and how composedly
The spirit rests and feels secure from all
"The strife of tongues:" reposing on the firm,
Immovable, unchangeable defence—
The bulwark of *the favor of the Lord*.¹⁸

What does that say? Where is the meaning? The person? Even philosophical or narrative poetry, in order to be good, must reverberate with the heartbeat of a living artist, unique in perceptions and persuasions.

In "The Second Coming," one of the great religious poems of the early part of this century, the bereavement of the poet, William Butler Yeats, and his anguished concern for "twenty centuries of stony sleep [that] were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle"¹⁹ are unforgettable because they mirror a man alive to human enigma. It

is the aliveness behind the poem that involves us all in its power. Just so, if the great Mormon story is to be told in verse, as President Kimball has suggested, it must be more than a catalogue of events or a series of moralizations on them. It must bring to life the story behind the story: the feelings, the sleeplessness, the waverings, the hot and cold that reveal the personal. As journals must, if they are worth saving, the recording of the Mormon epic must contain more than the obvious. This fact is taught in classes and is espoused in circles of literati throughout artistic Mormondom; writers know this. But in Church print a poet is seldom allowed to show his or her best—his or her deepest—self.

A poet must be extensively curious and able, as Roethke suggests, “to say more than one thing at a time,”²⁰ in order to write a memorable poem. And moving with the times is vital. Today is important—one must be in touch with some poets a little more current than Longfellow. A cultivated respect for modernity has to spring from the traditional roots.

I wonder what would happen in the arts, social sciences, and humanities if the same kind of regard for contemporary excellence were extended to them as is extended to fields such as medicine, business, mathematics, even athletics. What if the support and trust that is offered the scientist, the businessman, the teacher, and the coach in LDS circles were given the Mormon poet, writer, and editor? Let us imagine some possibilities.

First would be the recognition that, as in the other fields, expertise in writing involves more than simply *wanting* to be good at the job and being a good person. All the fasting and prayer and dedication in the world cannot turn one into a teacher, a writer, or an editor if he or she does not have the talent—and the training. Putting words together so that they touch, stir, and motivate is a most elusive skill. The talent for it is as inborn as the ability to sing or add or run well. The life is so short, the craft so long to learn! It has to be honed so carefully to become professional. But too often it is assumed that if a person can speak the language he can write it and that “A” should be given for effort alone.

A few years ago the General Board of the Mutual made an Olympian attempt to have the age-group manuals rewritten, and committees were called for that purpose. Members of the Beehive

committee, under the direction of a determined and capable chairman, spent three months in frustrated fasting and prayer and failed to turn out even one lesson. It was not that they lacked ideas, desire, intelligence, or wherewithal; it was simply that there was not a writer among them. The mysterious ingredients necessary to put lucid sentences together with some style and verve were missing. Yet the saddest part of the story is that the committee members felt haplessly guilty for not being able to come up with the lessons on schedule. Why is it so hard for us to admit that writing is not just a matter of testimony, inspiration, and earnest desire to write about the good? It is a tough business, demanding more than the ability to delight in the game of words and to play with ideas. If it is to carry its weight to the world, writing requires the imposition of talented honesty.

At the same time, for the talented there can be nothing more exciting or challenging than to be *well* edited—if the editor is someone of stature and knowledgeable standards. To hone and polish, to rewrite to meet the standards of a qualified editor, to struggle for excellence is heady endeavor for the writer. But unless that editor is someone the skilled writer can respect as a professional, the process is deadly. The Church must be willing to choose its editors as carefully as it chooses its experts in other fields, and the good ones already at work need to be trusted to demand excellence from writers who would be published. To be effective, the editors must not be demeaned through supervision by those who know less about their work than they do.

And editors in turn must come to trust a readership that deserves the honor of being allowed self-arrival. Readers need to be granted the excitement of catching on to the phrase, sensing the idea, and growing by stretching, rather than being diminished by exposure to trite, high-blown averageness. Taste can be taught without fear. Goodness and quality can stand on their own merit. We all fear what we do not understand, but understanding can develop through exposure just as love can, and it can warm and sustain in the same way.

Second, those who would write must be trained—just as experts in other fields are. Knowledge of the craft, as well as exposure to the great ideas of the ages and faith of generations, can come only

through study. And to regard the study of contemporaries as less than important is as tragic as to pay no attention to poetic excellence in other times—or to excellence in other fields. The nineteenth century was not enslaved by the eighteenth. What would Shelley have been had he tried to imitate Alexander Pope? Eliza R. Snow or Orson F. Whitney, with their infallible ear but unflinching didacticism, are worth looking back to as recorders and sentimentalists, but not necessarily as craftsmen. Important though it is to know the last-century craft of Dickinson, Whitman, Shelley, Browning, to know only their craft can be stifling to today's poets.

While the greats of any day are worthy of study, and while new ways are not always necessarily the best ways, it is vital that the serious writer give current techniques some consideration. To stir about among the moderns is to learn of today and the choices it offers to utilize both traditional and open forms in the subtle voice of this, our half-century. Experimentation is necessary to the life of the mind in any field; why should it be suspect in the arts? We must grapple with our limitations and isolate our strengths, and nothing will aid us as much as study of and with those who know.

Third, there must be a willingness to allow the writer to go to the end of his or her thoughts, and the writer must accept the responsibility of doing so. In a time when intellectualism is regarded by many as the great seducer, it is imperative to permit each individual to conduct his or her own genuine search for truth. We cannot all think alike. Generality and assumption will not do for the seeker, nor will a built-in agenda. The poet in particular needs to see, sort, sift, and ponder—to search the thoughts and experiences of self and others and not to feel deterred by fear of what might be found. Belief must be confirmed and sustained by constant discovery, even when it means serving the apprenticeship in doubt. Old lamps must be lighted by new charges, thence to be taken by new vision and language to still higher and as-yet-unanticipated truths. Of course, no one arrives at this point without a struggle. Along the way there will be the contentions of faith and doubt, the sometimes harsh contacts of the generations, the rerouting of understanding; but the writer must be willing—and permitted—to make the lonely journey. And if what the faithful believe is true, this wandering—however far—should in the end be no threat to the personal equanimity of either the seeker or the guide.

Fourth, there must be sanction given for taking time to sink—or rise—to levels beyond the superficial and perceivable in a culture that demands observance of norms, in a church that wants its members to be ready to “stand up and be counted” for almost everything. And credence must be given to innumerable personal confirmations of truth and right. As James E. Talmage says, “For all truth, being eternal, is superior to reason in the sense of being manifest to reason but not a creation of reason.”²¹ “If theology be theory, then religion is practice; if theology be precept, religion is example. Each should be the complement of the other.”²² Above my desk I have posted this saying: “Oh, Lord, help me to feed thy sheep as well as count them.” Applied to Talmage’s reasoning, it might be paraphrased, “Oh, Lord, help me to make a religion of my theology, and by reason to apply it honestly in practice and example, in thoughtful discipleship to my writing.” Art must be more than an illustration of doctrine; it must be a confirmation of faith.

I state without apology that I need a room of my own and time of my own—unaccountable, nonstatistical, unobservable but credible place and time in which to explore. As Carl Tucker says in describing Robert Lowell’s work, “Everything else is the raw material from which the self of the poem is forged.”²³ The forging is private—sometimes painful, always a struggle to see and feel and accept. It is never easy to look life in the face, to peer through the surface of the events and facts of life into their meaning. But that is the poet’s work, and no justification or explanation should be necessary.

Eliza Snow is a marvelous enigma to the modern Mormon woman poet. With her untethered capacity for endeavor, she wrote in circumstances much nearer those of a man than a woman. What justifications did she have to make for her time away or alone? Her allegiance to the faith must never have been questioned, because she never exposed on the page any of herself—only the exhortations to believing. Little wonder journals of the time are much more interesting than the poetry. And just as we must not pull away from the business of living, the writer of today must not pull away from the business of recording it—all of it—in fairness and honesty and candor. This is the only way in which we can find and know the Aunt Evalyns and the Katies, along with the substance they have to offer to our present. The person who writes has a decided emotional

advantage, and especially the person who writes poetry for self-explanation. "Poetry," says Dr. Jack J. Leedy, pioneer psychiatrist at Brooklyn Cumberland Medical Center in New York, in a *Wall Street Journal* interview, "is simply a road to the unconscious. It is a way to express something you can't get out any other way. We look at peptic ulcers and other psychosomatic symptoms as simply poems struggling to be born."²⁴

Thus, recording strictly for personal exploration of self and circumstances must, in our minds, take its proper place as a viable and respectable activity. Most of us, in our need to feel "useful" and "productive," are easily swept up in a kind of consumerism that validates private effort only if it seems worthy of public approval or consumption. After all, we argue, what good is anything if only we enjoy it or are enlarged by it? But writing a poem can mean the ultimate clarification of a feeling or isolation of an idea. It can mean the cleansing of a cloudy window, the exclusive experiencing of an epiphany, or a just plain fun activity. No one else needs to share it in order for it to work its wonders, and it does not need to be judged to be worthwhile. As my poet friend Clarice Short once quipped, "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." Not everyone who sings is a performer; not everyone who writes needs to try for publication. And we who are granted a hearing or a look generally find that it is possible to love the maker of the song or the poem without loving the product.

I would like to end with a poem that is not mediocre. When she was ten, our youngest daughter, Megan, wrote a ten-year-old's poem about growing older. In it, her teddy bear was her "objective correlative"—her vehicle for understanding.

TEDDY

One day I found him
while sorting out some clothes.
He lay there at the very bottom.
He was durty [*sic*] and worn out.
Mom said I got him for my first
Christmas.
In his zipper in his back there was some
very stale candy that *someone*

must have put in there
for a night that she couldn't sleep.
I used to talk to him all night,
he'd solve all of my problems,
and any of my fears.

Now he sits
with his little durty [*sic*] body
slumped against the wall
and stares with his almost real eyes.
We still talk
and the candy still sits.
But I'll forget.
And he'll sit for a long time
until one day I sort again
and maybe find him.
But then his button eyes might
be closed,
and his fur worn away, and
then I'll have many problems
to be solved,
and no Teddy to talk to.

And no Teddy to talk to. Even then, chiaroscuro—the candy and its going stale—figured in her poem.

The complexity becomes more complex; and, as a teddy bear loses its power to give comfort, the soul moves on to other stations that demand different observations and focus. What comforted Megan at ten can no longer as she turns twenty or thirty-five or half a hundred. She will need to refurbish her mind with new ideas and her heart with new relationships and feelings that can color and comfort as they challenge and change her. If she writes—and goodness knows that I hope she will, for her own enrichment if not for publication—and if she reads, as surely she must, it will have to be with an adult perspective. The poem will, if it is good enough, furnish the correlative for her sorting—the respect for reality—and the ability to know the taste of the apple that cannot be proved or explained.

Hopefully there will be poems by Mormon writers whose substance and honesty will compel and enliven her and keep her

faith in what matters. I wish that she could be one of them, painting the depths and heights in rich chiaroscuro; but even more, I hope that those who are doing so will be writing the Mormon story as it has never been written. And I hope that it will be here in Utah, in the familiar, that literarily we come to life. Better here where love can prevail and excellence can abide—in the chiaroscuro that gives light to light to bless us all with new vision and belief and ability.

The most exciting thing for any of us as artists is to know that ultimately, what happens for the best happens for all of us. As any one of us gets better we all can. We can all learn from each other and partake of the excellence that any one of us has to offer. In the camaraderie of honesty and effort and genuine caring for the craft and each other, we make ourselves limitless and truly religious; we come closer to the best by loving the best and by being unwilling to settle for less. What more could God have intended in gracing us at all with any ability to see?

Notes

1. *Sunstone* 1, no. 3 (1976):73.
2. This quote is attributable to Will Durant, but I am unable to locate the original source.
3. "The Poet's Business," in Theodore Roethke, *Straw for the Fire: From the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke, 1943-63*, ed. David Wagoner (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), p. 172.
4. *Exponent II* 4 (Fall 1977):14.
5. T. S. Eliot, *A Dialogue on Dramatic Poetry* (n.p., 1928).
6. Kenneth Taylor, ed., *The Living Bible* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman & Co., 1973). The passage quoted is 1 Corinthians 13:1.
7. Archibald MacLeish, *Poetry and Experience* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 89.
8. Preface of Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1910).
9. Pablo Neruda, *Toward the Splendid City* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1974), p. 17.
- 50 10. Eliot, *Dialogue*.

11. *The Ensign*, July 1977, p. 93.
12. Again, the quote is attributable to Robert Frost but the source has eluded me.
13. Eugene England, "Great Books or True Religion," *Dialogue* 9, no. 4 (1974):40.
14. Emma Lou Thayne, *Until Another Day for Butterflies* (Salt Lake City: Parliament, 1973).
15. Sarah Orne Jewett, *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1897), p. 55.
16. Neruda, p. 17.
17. "To the Writers of Fiction," in Eliza R. Snow, *Poems, Religious, Historical, and Political*, 2 vols. (Liverpool, England: F. D. Richards, 1856), 1:166.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.
19. Oscar Williams, ed., *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry: English and American*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 67.
20. Roethke, p. 170.
21. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1899), p. 5.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
23. *The Saturday Review*, 29 October 1977.
24. *The Wall Street Journal*, 13 March 1975.

One Wife or Several? A Comparative Study of Late Nineteenth-Century Marriage in Utah

Phillip R. Kunz

In his paper Professor Kunz, professor of sociology at Brigham Young University, expresses the feeling that the popular images of plural marriage both inside and outside the LDS church are grossly in error. The picture which emerges from his survey of the literature and use of statistical data is of an institution which many of the Latter-day Saints resisted, which was practiced by perhaps ten percent of the men, and which principally the best educated and most able entered. It did not produce a larger number of children for Mormon society, as the Mormons may have hoped; and, while the women were not held in bondage, as critics indicated, both they and their husbands were evidently more dissatisfied with polygamy than with monogamy—as is indicated in particular by both the impressionistic and statistical evidence of comparative divorce rates.

Kunz concludes that there was little to recommend the system except religious conviction. It produced little if any economic advantage for the men or women; it evidently failed to produce happier marriages; and it was clearly a difficult system to live, particularly in the culture of nineteenth-century America. Thus, religious conviction more than any other single factor seems to best explain the practice of plural marriage among the Mormons.

Polygamy is a term that describes two marriage practices: polyandry, or the marriage of one woman to two or more men (a system very rarely found); and polygyny, or the marriage of one man to two or more wives at the same time. Although studies have shown that a large percentage of the world's societies have sanctioned the practice of polygyny, in actual practice the nearly universal existence of an equal sex ratio has severely restricted its incidence. Still, because polygyny is still prevalent in some societies, it is of interest to the social scientist concerned with comparative family patterns. The purpose of this paper is to examine polygyny as practiced by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Information will be presented from previous empirical analyses of the Mormon case, from original journals and diaries of the time, and from current research.¹

Why did the practice of polygyny in America begin in the midst of a society which was so deeply entrenched in puritanical monogamy? The explanations vary across time and according to vested interests. At some time prior to 1843—and perhaps as early as 1831—the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation regarding the eternal nature of marriage and the plurality of wives. Joseph Smith indicated that he knew the revelation perfectly from beginning to end and could recite it while his brother Hyrum wrote it down.² That revelation, now the 132nd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, one of the four volumes of Latter-day Saint scripture, begins as follows:

Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, that inasmuch as you have inquired of my hand to know and understand wherein I, the Lord, justified my servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as also Moses, David and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives and concubines. . . .³

The remaining sixty-six verses instruct readers regarding eternal marriage and briefly specify how plural marriage is to operate.

Initially, some of the few who knew about the impending practice of polygyny, or “the principle,” or polygamy, as it was often called, were shocked by the new doctrine. Lorenzo Snow, fifth president of the Church, reports that the Prophet Joseph told him that “an angel from heaven appeared before him with a drawn sword, threatening him with destruction unless he went forward and obeyed the commandment.”⁴ Eventually Joseph Smith and a few trusted leaders and friends took additional wives; then, as rumors about the new type of marriage began, the already existing persecution found a new *raison d’être*.

When Phoebe Carter Woodruff (Wilford’s first wife) first heard of plural marriage she thought that it was the most wicked thing she had ever heard, and she opposed it until it made her sick. After “fasting and prayer,” she was finally convinced that the doctrine really was the will of God and she obeyed.⁵

The difficulty of accepting “the principle” is illustrated by the statement of polygynist Heber C. Kimball’s daughter, Helen, who also became a plural wife:

The worst of slaves is he whom passion rules. The faults and weaknesses which are born in us are the enemies we are to grapple with, and those who have the greatest, and can put them under their feet, are the greatest conquerors and will wear the brightest crowns. It is only the Spirit of God, which follows obedience to His commandments, that has assisted the Latter-day Saints in overcoming and subduing themselves as far as they have, instead of allowing their passions to overcome them, and I assure you that this is the whole secret, and the only thing that makes the difference between us and the unbelieving, or those who persist in fighting against this holy principle.

If I did not know that my husband was actuated by the purest of motives and by religious principle I could not have fortified myself against that 'demon Jealousy,' and had it not been for the powerful testimony from the Lord, which gave me a knowledge for myself that this principle is of celestial birth, I do not believe that I could have submitted to it for a moment. Therefore I can take no credit to myself, only as far as I rendered obedience to Him. I was afraid of no man, but I feared to rebel against the Almighty, though at times it was like the tearing of my very heart-strings, and it took much prayer and struggling to overcome. Yet through it all I have stood as a pillar by the side of my husband and can say with truth that my soul has been purified and my love has become more exalted. My willing and undivided heart is laid upon the altar, and all my life and talents which the Lord has lent me, I wish to be devoted to this great and glorious cause.

I have had no cause to doubt my husband's love for me and my children, and he is a very devoted father to all his children. I know by my own experience, and that of my sainted mother, and also of other first wives, who have acted their part nobly, that they have not only retained the affection of their husbands, but to see such a great sacrifice made by the wife of his bosom has increased his love and exalted her in his eyes. I have had this testimony from different husbands and wives.⁶

Following the Prophet's death in 1844, the number of polygynous marriages increased considerably. In August 1852 Orson Pratt and Brigham Young spoke on polygyny in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, and soon afterward Church publications carried these talks on "the principle." It was then publicly preached and openly practiced. Heber C. Kimball said,

I would not be afraid to promise a man who is sixty years of age, if he will take the counsel of brother Brigham and his brethren, that he will renew his age. I have noticed that a man who has but one wife, and is inclined to that doctrine, soon begins to wither and

dry up, while a man who goes into plurality looks fresh, young, and sprightly. Why is this? Because God loves that man, and because he honors His work and word. Some of you may not believe this; but I not only believe it—I also know it. For a man of God to be confined to one woman is small business; for it is as much as we can do now to keep up under the burdens we have to carry; and I do not know what we should do if we had only one wife apiece.⁷

After the death of Brigham Young, persecution began to intensify. Josiah Hickman, a professor of physics and psychology, wrote of the treatment of those who practiced “the principle,” indicating that during the final years that it was practiced by the Latter-day Saints more than 2,500 men were imprisoned.⁸ (Arrington cites only 1,035—still a large number.⁹) Hickman goes on to indicate that

at one time the penitentiaries in Arizona, Utah, and Idaho were filled with “co-habs” as they were called. In this emergency the government chartered the state prison at Detroit, Michigan and sent many of the prisoners there. Hundreds of the polygamists were absent from their homes for years either in penitentiaries or in hiding until their children did not know them. Women also were in hiding; babes were born in caves, mountain defiles, and in secluded spots of the desert. Fortunes were wasted and homes made desolate. This, in part, was the sacrifice made by those who would not renounce this principle or set their families adrift. Of the thousands imprisoned, liberty and amnesty were offered to each if he would abandon his wives and children; but, be it to their honor, not one accepted the olive branch at such a sacrifice.¹⁰

While persecution was very difficult for many of those involved, it was also the basis of some rather interesting humor. During the debates regarding the seating of Senator Smoot in Congress, one senator, a well-known philanderer, was very vocal in his denunciation of the evils of polygamy and the seating of Smoot. But his colleague, Senator Boies Penrose, disposed *toward* seating Senator Smoot and knowing of the other senator’s extramarital activities, countered, “It is better to be a polygamist who doesn’t polyg than a monogamist who doesn’t monog.”¹¹

56 Margaret Smoot indicates that even in Utah some of the persecutors had a double standard:

And I regret to say that occasionally they succeed in decoying from the path of virtue and lead captive a few giddy youths of our community—while they and their patrons at the same time are crying out against polygamy as a corrup [corrupt] and demoralizing principle.¹²

Between 1862 and 1887 Congress passed a number of acts designed to eradicate the practice. These included the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862, the Edmunds Law of 1882, and the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887. The Edmunds Act disfranchised all polygynists and the Edmunds-Tucker Act brought about the confiscation of Church property. By 1879, the Supreme Court of the United States had upheld the constitutionality of the Morrill Act; and in 1890 President Wilford Woodruff issued a public manifesto, which was accepted by the Church membership in general conference in October of 1890. The Manifesto read, in part, as follows:

Inasmuch as laws have been enacted by Congress forbidding plural marriages, which laws have been pronounced constitutional by the court of last resort, I hereby declare my intention to submit to those laws, and to use my influence with the members of the Church over which I preside to have them do likewise.¹³

Since that time, the practice of polygyny has not received general Church approval, though the principle per se was not rejected.

Currently there is a fairly large number of people in and around Utah who have polygynous marriages. However, these are not orthodox Latter-day Saints; members of the Church who join organizations which practice plural marriage are excommunicated from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. How numerous current polygynists are in Utah and surrounding states, no one knows; the best estimates state that several thousand people are involved. The current polygynists need to be studied to ascertain the implications of their life-style for them, their children, their organizations, and the larger society in which they live.

Several studies of Mormon polygyny have attempted to make some objective evaluation of the practice. The first of these was a master's thesis by J. E. Hickman submitted to the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University in 1907. It was a very detailed study for that period of time; Hickman weighed, measured, and tested nearly twenty-four thousand persons, twenty-six hundred of

whom were of polygamous origin. Contrary to popular assertions that polygamy was creating a degenerate race, his analysis indicated that those of plural origin were about an inch taller, five pounds heavier, and about three or four percent higher in average intelligence as shown on test scores.¹⁴

J. E. Hulett's study of plural marriage was based on 100 interviews conducted during 1937 and 1938 with 78 surviving members of 47 polygamous families and with their children. While the study suffers somewhat from being based on recollections of events 47 years or more in the past, it does offer some interesting insights. Hulett found, for example, a great variety of responses to living-condition demands. This variety he attributed to the fact that polygamy for Mormons was an innovation within a culture that taught monogamy and thus offered better social support and socialization for monogamy than for the new marriage and family system.¹⁵

In 1956 Stanley Ivins wrote an article in which he discussed some of the historical detail of polygamy. Using the earlier data collected by Esshom,¹⁶ he estimated that "between fifteen and twenty percent of the Mormon families of Utah were polygamous."¹⁷

The next major study of polygyny was the doctoral dissertation of Vicky Burgess-Olson in 1975 at Northwestern University. Using extensive library sources and Mormon church archives to which she had open access, she studied 156 families in depth, collecting all available information on husbands, wives, and children. On the basis of this information she focused upon the answers to twelve questions, including the relationship of polygyny to the structure and dynamic pattern of monogamous families, the motivation for the practice, and provision for widows and spinsters. She found that "polygyny allows for much more variation in family dynamics than monogamy and that individual family variation was the most prevalent pattern."¹⁸ In other words, there was no standard or pattern or norm which dictated how polygyny should be practiced.

The final study of this type to which I will refer was made by Smith and Kunz; while they discussed several of the demographic characteristics of those who practiced polygyny and monogamy in late nineteenth-century Utah, they were primarily interested in the relationship of polygyny and fertility. They found that wives in

polygynous unions had a lower completed marital fertility than those of monogamous unions.¹⁹ Muhsam had argued earlier that such would result simply from reduced opportunities to conceive due to competition with other wives for the husband's attention. The Smith and Kunz studies, though failing to verify Muhsam's argument that decreased coital frequency caused a lower birthrate, nevertheless agreed with the findings with regard to fertility.²⁰

One particularly rich source of data for the early Utah period in which polygyny was practiced is a volume of genealogies collected by Frank Eshom from 1907 to 1913.²¹ Eshom traveled throughout the Utah-Wyoming-Idaho area during this period attempting to collect as many genealogies as possible of pioneering families arriving in Utah in 1847 or thereafter. A complete genealogy includes name of husband, name(s) of wife or wives, marriage dates, names and birth dates of children, broad occupational information, some death dates for spouses and children, and some marriage dates for children. In the complete Eshom collection there is information concerning 6,200 men of whom all but 83, or 1.3 percent, were married (Table 1). Of those married, 71.5 percent of the males were listed as having

Table 1
Marital Status of Early Utah Men

	% of Total Number	Number	% of Subpart
Single	1.3%	83	100%
Monogamous	71.5	4430	
One wife		(3961)	89.4
Remarried*		(469)	10.6
			<hr/> 100.0%
Polygynous	27.2	1687	
Two wives	(19.11%)	(1185)	70.24%
Three wives	(5.65)	(350)	20.75
Four wives	(1.40)	(87)	5.16
Five wives	(.73)	(45)	2.67
Six wives	(.11)	(7)	.42
Seven wives	(.08)	(5)	.30
Eight wives	(.04)	(3)	.18
Nine wives	(.01)	(1)	.006
Ten or more wives	(.06)	(4)	.24
			<hr/> 100.00%
Total	100.0%	6200	

*"Remarried" indicates those men who took a second wife only after the death or divorce of the first.

only one wife at any given time in their lives. Of these monogamous men, 10.6 percent had remarried following the death or divorce of the first wife. Polygynous men with two wives accounted for 19.1 percent of the total, those with three wives for 5.6 percent, and those with four to ten or more wives for just over 2 percent. Of all the men who practiced polygyny, *over 90 percent had no more than two or three wives*. Thus, the intensity (number of wives per polygynous male) is not very high. All polygynists were ascertained by a recorded marriage to a second wife prior to the recorded death or divorce of the first wife, or, in the case of missing marriage and/or death dates, by the overlapping birthdates of children borne by different wives.

The most striking feature of polygyny whenever it is practiced is that it can exist at all considering the worldwide sex ratio of 106 male births to every 100 females born. There are some factors which may change this ratio somewhat, such as male infanticide, some types of migration patterns, or high mortality due to warfare; but none of these would explain the Utah case. George Q. Cannon correctly understood this situation:

I do not wish to convey the idea that plural marriage can be universal. In the very nature of the things as I have often said, it is impossible; the equality of the sexes would prevent this, were men ever so desirous to make it so. Take our own territory: *the males outnumber the females*; it cannot therefore be a practice without limit among use.²² [emphasis added]

An analysis of the census data for 1850 by Smith and Kunz indicated a sex ratio of 113 in Utah. In the three following decades the sex ratios were 101, 102, and 107, respectively.²³ Thus, the excess of males was greatest at the beginning and the end of the period studied. Careful analysis of this census data indicated only a slight excess of females aged twenty to thirty years as compared with men thirty to forty years of age, which more nearly corresponds with the reality of the "marriage market" for plural marriage.

One of the reasons most often given for the practice of polygamy was the female surplus. For example, a 1970 study of 421 residents of rural Utah indicated that the respondents believed a female surplus was the prime reason for the Mormon practice of polygyny.²⁴ Another study, this one taken among Brigham Young

University students in 1977, indicated that 41 percent believed essentially the same.²⁵

While there was a slight surplus of women of marriageable age, there was apparently also a market for marriage and the possibility of "alternative" partners. Lydia Wilson wrote:

I began going out with J.W. Wilson but during this time and the time I was married I had chances to marry at that time polygamy was practised. So I had chances a plenty to go into it, but didn't quite do it. I went out often but never cared for any one as much as J.W.²⁶

Perhaps the most *quoted* estimate of the incidence of Latter-day Saint polygamy is 2 percent, a figure often defensively cited by apologists who timidly indicate that "after all, only about 2 percent of the males practiced polygamy." Because there are no existing lists of polygamists, we have to rely on samples—some being more reliable than others. The 27.2 percent from the Esshom collection is too high because it is biased toward the leaders, who are more likely to have practiced polygamy.²⁷ His collection was geared to men who held Church or civic office of some type. Other estimates are Arrington's 10 percent²⁸ and Nels Anderson's 8.5 percent.²⁹ Based on a careful analysis of census data and the age relations of husbands and additional wives Smith and Kunz estimated that 8.8 percent of marriageable men in 1870 actually practiced polygamy.³⁰

Other demographic characteristics are of interest in understanding the sample reported here. Table 2 presents the decade of birth of the men in the sample. Thus, the range is from 1770 to 1889 with the most born from 1830 to 1839. Over 70 percent were born after the Church was organized and most were born well before the persecutions of the last decade of polygamy. Fifty-eight percent of the men were born in the United States and 42 percent were foreign born. Of those who were not born in Utah, 42 percent migrated to Utah in the decade 1860 to 1869, and an additional 27 percent came in the following decade.

One may inquire as to the source of the polygamous wives. Many non-Mormons viewed the missionary program as a recruitment program for girls for extra wives for Mormons. For example, many communications passed between the United States State Department

Table 2
Decade of Birth of
Early Utah Men

Decade	Frequency
1770-1779	8
1780-1789	24
1790-1799	66
1800-1809	217
1810-1819	397
1820-1829	548
1830-1839	767
1840-1849	699
1850-1859	694
1860-1869	497
1870-1879	278
1880-1889	90
Not available	772
Total	5057

and the government of Switzerland in the 1880s. One letter from the Legation of the United States reads as follows:

Berne, April 21, 1888

SIR: In pursuance of the instructions conveyed by your No. 130, of the 22d ultimo, on yesterday I called to see the chief of the Swiss Federal department of justice and police, orally and unofficially advising with him as to measures that might be taken to prevent the emigration from Switzerland to the United States of persons who intend to violate the laws by entering into polygamous relations, and informing him that it had come to the knowledge of the United States Government that Mormon agents in Switzerland had lately been increasing their activity.³¹

The representative of a foreign state at Salt Lake wrote the following to the Swiss consul at San Francisco:

The Mormon missionaries take yearly to this place about one hundred persons who, enjoying an honorable and honest case in Switzerland, are obliged to undergo here all the torture of poverty, after the Mormons have shorn them to the hide, leaving them nothing but their eyes to weep. I had to occupy myself with several cases, the recital of which would split the heart of a tiger, but was not able to move the stone which the Mormons carry in the place of their heart.³²

Table 3
Marriage Type of U.S.-
and Foreign-Born Utah Husbands

Birthplace	Marriage Type		Number
	Monogamy	Polygamy	
U.S.	72.4%	27.6%	1005
Foreign	59.6	40.4	736

$X^2 = 31.4, p < .001$

Table 3 examines the relationship of place of birth to type of marriage. The data indicate that, of the men born in the United States, about 72 percent were monogamous and 28 percent were polygamous, compared to 60 percent of foreign-born men who were monogamous and 40 percent polygamous. Additional wives follow in about the same proportions, with 68 percent of the U.S.-born wives living in monogamy and 32 percent in polygamy while foreign-born wives figured 23 percent in monogamy and 47 percent in polygamy, as may be seen in Table 4. This suggests that foreign-

Table 4
Marriage Type of U.S.-
and Foreign-Born Utah Wives

Birthplace	Marriage Type		Number
	Monogamy	Polygamy	
U.S.	68.37%	31.7%	1188
Foreign	52.7	47.3	829

$X^2 = 50.1, p < .001$

born men were slightly more monogamous than foreign-born women. Horsley concludes, after a ten-year study of polygynous families, that girls from polygynous families were more often selected as polygynous wives because of their socialization within such a family structure. They know how plural marriage works and for the most part are already converted to it.³³

Data on the occupation of the husbands and the type of marriage were obtained from 1,343 cases and are presented in Table 5, where one may observe that farmers were more likely to be monogamous than skilled workers, public servants, and professionals. Seventy percent of the farmers in our sample were monogamous,

Table 5
Number of Wives
in Differing Occupations of Husbands

Occupation	Marriage Type			Total Number	Total %
	Monogamous	Polygamous 2 or 3 wives	4 or more wives		
Farmer	70.4%	24.1%	5.5%	652	100.0
Skilled or public servant	60.5	29.1	10.4	564	100.0
Professional	64.6	29.1	6.3	127	100.0

$X^2 = 15.9, p < .01$

while about 61 percent of the skilled workers or public servants and 65 percent of the professionals were monogamous. Twenty-four percent of the farmers had two or three wives, while in the other two groups 29 percent had two or three wives. The skilled worker or public servant category had the highest percentage with four or more wives—just over 10 percent.

Table 6 presents some characteristics of the husbands regarding their mean completed fertility and age of marriage. As may be observed in the first column, the mean number of children is just under eight for monogamous husbands and just under twelve total for monogamous husbands who took a second wife after the death or divorce of the first. Polygamists with two wives had a mean fertility of just over sixteen children, and those with three wives just over twenty children.

The total number of children per father increased with additional polygamous wives, but the mean fertility per wife was less than that

Table 6
Characteristics of Husbands
in Differing Types of Families†

Husband's marriage pattern	Mean completed fertility	Mean age at first marriage	Mean age at second marriage	Mean age at third marriage	Total number in sample*
Monogamist—no sequential marriage	7.82	25.3	—	—	967
Monogamist—sequential marriage	12.61	24.2	43.6	—	114
Polygynist—two concurrent wives	16.16	24.2	36.1	—	227
Polygynist—three concurrent wives	20.11	23.5	33.1	43.3	147
All husbands	12.11	24.8	36.8	43.3	1,455

*Number varies in table cells depending upon missing data. Sequential marriage is remarriage of monogamist subsequent to death of first wife.

†Table from Smith and Kunz, "Polygamy and Fertility in Nineteenth-Century America," p. 470. (See Note 1 for complete bibliographic information.)

of the monogamous wife, except in the case of the two-wife family. If each woman represented in the table had had the mean number of children of the monogamous wife, there would have been a total of 16,344 children. As it was, however, the women bore a total of 15,624 children, or 720 fewer than the statistically projected number. Thus, plural marriage, including monogamous remarriage, actually slightly suppressed the total number of children born. Stated another way, the man with two concurrent wives had more than double the fertility of his monogamist counterpart, but the addition of the third wife increased the fertility by only 25 percent rather than by the 50 percent statistically expected. An analysis shows that 69 General Authorities who were polygynous had a mean of seven wives and a mean of three children per wife.

Examination of Table 6 also indicates that the monogamous husband married when he was 25 while the polygynous husband married at an average age of 24. Noteworthy also is the lower mean age of the three-wife husband at first marriage: 23.5 years. Marriage at an earlier age thus appears to be associated with polygyny. The interesting question arises of whether men planned to enter polygyny and then began earlier, or whether men who married their first wives at a younger age had other characteristics which predisposed them to be selected for polygyny.

Earlier data indicated that the stereotype of a man with a harem of women is not true. Table 6 also tends to destroy the notion that a man married wives in rapid succession. The mean age of first marriage for a two-wife man was 24. The mean age (36) at which a husband took a second wife was over ten years older than that at which he wed the first wife. This time lapse was slightly less for three-wife husbands than for two-wife husbands, but only by about three years. The space from second to third wife was also about ten years, with the average husband being 43 years of age when he married his third wife.

Women, on the other hand, had quite a different age pattern at first marriage. Most of them were younger than the men by about three years. The mean of age for the first wife of a monogamous marriage is 21 years, and for the second, 28 years. At times, a woman whose husband had died was married by another man who thus entered into polygamy. The fact that such women had been married

previously, along with the fact that a few older women were married to someone in order to "save their souls," results in a higher mean age for the second and third wives, as Table 7 indicates. As may be noted, however, all the wives, and especially the second and third wives, were much younger than their husbands.

Table 7
Mean and Standard Deviation
of Husbands' Marriage Age

Family type	Wife number	Mean	Standard deviation	Total number in sample
One-wife	One	20.8 yrs.	4.54	792
	Two*	28.1	11.10	84
Two-wife	One	20.0	4.57	257
	Two	22.7	7.07	216
Three-wife	One	21.0	4.93	170
	Two	22.4	6.65	166
	Three	22.9	8.54	136

*Married after death or divorce of first wife.

Because the practice of polygamy was introduced into a monogamous society, one may properly assume that a great deal of social adjustment was necessary. And so it was. In a recent paper, Campbell and Campbell indicate that

the divorce rate and number of separations was high, not because polygamous marriage was difficult in the American context, per se, but because the contact of Mormon polygamy was a state of anomie or normlessness caused in part by their millennialist belief system.³⁴

They base their conclusions on a recorded granting of 1,645 divorces by Brigham Young. Although they acknowledge that the records do not indicate whether or not they were polygynous, apparently most were. Campbell and Campbell go on to state that "it is possible that there were in excess of 2,000 divorces granted prior to the 1890 Manifesto."³⁵

While Brigham Young preached that blessings would be forfeited by divorce, he also recognized the difficulty of relationships which were not stable.³⁶ In September 1856, during the height of a religious retrenchment movement, he wrote:

I wish my own women to understand that what I am going to say is for them as well as others, and I want those who are here to tell their sisters, yes, all the women of the community, and then write it back to the States, and do as you please with it. I am going to give you from this time to the sixth day of October next, for reflection, that you may determine whether you wish to stay with your husbands or not, and then I am going to set every woman at liberty and say to them, Now go your way, my women with the rest, go your way. And my wives have got to do one of two things; either round up their shoulders to endure the afflictions of this world, and live their religion, or they may leave, for I will not have them about me. I will go into heaven alone rather than have scratching and fighting around me.³⁷

Two years later Brigham Young admonished:

It is not right for the brethren to divorce their wives the way they do. I am determined that if men don't stop divorcing their wives, I shall stop sealing. Men shall not abuse the gifts of God and the privileges the way they are doing. Nobody can say that I have any interest in the matter, for I charge nothing for the sealings, but I do charge for the divorcing. I want the brethren to stop divorcing their wives for it is not right.³⁸

While plural marriage created some difficult adjustment problems in some cases, marriage of any kind posed some problems. One woman wrote:

For awhile I found it hard to get wood and a few other things so I thot to better myself by marrying a man whose name was David Lewis. He promised to be a good father to my children but he was not. My oldest daughter went to live with Sanford Bingham's family and my son Bateman and my daughter Ellen went to live at Hector Haight's. I had a baby born Oct. 12. We named her Francis Lovina. I went on washing for the store hands. My other children were kicked from pillar to post. Finally I decided to get them home and run my own shebang.³⁹

One of these adjustment problems for families came in the form of persecution, which forced husbands to be away from their families for extended periods of time. Many times visits home had to be secret, and even children did not know of the presence of their father. Perhaps some used the separateness of the living arrangement to stay away from less favored wives without divorce. We get a glimpse of this problem from one woman at the time who said:

I craved some assurance of his love after placing 'my all' on the marriage altar. When he treated so lightly his appointment to come and see me 2 weeks after our marriage, is there any wonder that I was broken hearted. A week later he came but my enthusiasm was gone.⁴⁰

Neither of us, while he lived, ever referred to our separation, so we were both true to his desire that no unpleasant affairs be discussed. It wasn't easy for me. He came a few times to our home at Farmington to have dinner with us—on such occasions as Thanksgiving, Christmas.⁴¹

My problems were only details to Mr. Tanner. I don't suppose he ever felt concerned as to how I would work them out. I imagine that all his wives carried their own responsibilities. At least, I am sure they did the latter part of his life, for he did not seem interested in anyone and apparently no one was interested in him. He went back and forth from Salt Lake to Canada year after year alone.⁴²

I had the attitude of many women in Polygamy. I felt the responsibility of my family, and I developed an independence that women in monogamy never know. A woman in polygamy is compelled by her lone position to make confident of her children. How much more is this true when a woman is left entirely alone.⁴³

Campbell and Campbell cite a study of Quinn and note that of the 72 General Authorities who entered into plural marriage, "39 were involved in broken marriages, including 54 divorces, 26 separations and one annulment."⁴⁴ As written, this report implies a very high percentage of divorce among those men—54 percent. Such an approach stresses the men and not the total number of relationships, however. The 69 Church leaders had a total of 494 marriages or an average of about 7 wives. Of these 494 marriage relationships, 81—over 16 percent—ended in divorce, separation, or annulment. Just over 10 percent ended in divorce.

To more carefully determine the extent of divorce in polygamous marriages of that time, an analysis was undertaken using data from the four-generation genealogy group sheets in the patron index of the Genealogical Society library. After a random start, every plural marriage was examined for evidence of divorce. In addition, the family group sheets of the two following monogamous marriages were examined to determine the extent of divorce for monogamy.

Only marriages which were viable at some time during the period of 1844 to 1890 were included in the study. Also, the possibility was recognized that, because sheets were submitted by relatives of the families in the study, the divorce for both types of marriage would have been somewhat underrepresented.

The records of 315 polygamists and 650 monogamists were examined. Also examined were the records of 33 men who remarried after the death or divorce of the first wife. Of the polygamists, 28 (9 percent) were divorced, as compared to 3 monogamists (0.5 percent). Of the 23 monogamists who remarried, 3 divorced their first wife and none their second. Therefore, only 6 of the total 683 monogamists examined (0.9 percent) experienced divorce, indicating a lower incidence of divorce among monogamists than polygamists.

Those data only consider the men, however. It is more accurate to consider all of the wives of the polygynists and to count each husband-wife relationship as a marriage rather than to examine only whether or not the men were ever divorced. This approach reveals that the above-stated 28 polygynist divorces were spread over 1,029 women who became polygynous wives; therefore, less than 3 percent of polygynous *wives* experienced divorce. Of those 28 who became divorced, 20 (71 percent) were other than the first wife. Still, the incidence of divorce among monogamists was clearly less.

In summary, we see in polygyny an institution much misunderstood both today and during the time it was practiced. Imposed initially upon an unwilling people who accepted it because of deep religious convictions, it was used by enemies of the Church to feed the intensity of persecution. Far from the nineteenth-century lore of lecherous old men with vast harems, the truth was that perhaps nine percent of the eligible Latter-day Saint men practiced it, and most of them had two wives only. Often a tragic experience for those involved, divorce was more common in polygamous marriages than in comparable monogamous unions. The system took root not to care for an overwhelming surplus of women, not to produce a great number of children to populate a territory, and not to quench the lust of men, but for reasons like those of Adam who, when asked why he offered sacrifice, answered that he "knew not, save the Lord commanded" it.⁴⁵

Notes

1. James E. Smith and Phillip R. Kunz, "Polygamy and Fertility in Nineteenth-Century America," *Population Studies* 30 (1976):465-79.
2. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), 2:106.
3. Doctrine and Covenants 132:1. (Hereinafter referred to as D&C.)
4. Joseph Fielding Smith, Jr., *Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1950), p. 67.
5. Louis O. Turley, *The Effects of Plural Marriage upon the Membership of the Church* (Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1950), p. 51.
6. Helen M. Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884).
7. Brigham Young et al., *Journal of Discourses*, ed. George D. Watt et al., 26 vols. (Liverpool, England: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854-86), 5:22. (Hereinafter referred to as *JD*.)
8. J. E. Hickman, "A Critical Study of the Monogamic and Polygamic Offsprings of the Mormon People," (Master's thesis, Columbia University, 1907), p. 2.
9. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958), p. 359.
10. Hickman, p. 2.
11. Ernest Wilkinson, interview with author, Provo, Utah, December 1977. He remembered hearing the quote during his Washington era from one of the senators involved.
12. Margaret Smoot, "Experience of a Mormon Mother," 1880, ms., microfilm copy, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
13. D&C (p. 275).
14. Hickman indicated that he had heard "from press and university halls that plural marriage degenerated womanhood, ushered

babies into the world on an unequal footing—physically, mentally, and morally—besides lowering the moral and religious standard of the people. While a student at the University of Michigan, I was forced to listen to attacks—they hardly attained the dignity of arguments—made against plural marriage and its issue; vis., that the offspring were demented, dwarfed, ill-shapen, and densely ignorant” (Hickman, pp. 8–9).

These observations were corroborated by others. For example, Ivins quotes a statement attributed to the assistant surgeon of the United States Army, Robert Barthelow, by two professors and delivered in a paper at the New Orleans Academy of Sciences in 1861. It gives the following description of the children of polygynous marriages—but not of their parents who came from the more acceptable monogamous system:

The yellow, sunken, cadaverous visage; the greenish-colored eye; the thick, protuberant lips; the low forehead; the light, yellowish hair, and the lank, angular person, constitute an appearance so characteristic of the new race, the production of polygamy, as to distinguish them at a glance. The older men and women present all the physical peculiarities of the nationalities to which they belong; but these peculiarities are not propogated [*sic*] and continued in the new race; they are lost in the prevailing type. [Cited in Stanley S. Ivins, “Notes on Mormon Polygamy,” *Western Humanities Review* 10 (1956):238].

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Sisters and Little Saints: One Hundred Years of Mormon Primaries

Jill Mulvay Derr

Dealing with the first century of the Primary Association—the LDS weekday service for young children—Mrs. Derr has provided some provocative insights. Most important, perhaps, is the suggestion that Eliza R. Snow's thinking on children's education was influenced in part by her observation of the European kindergartens. Beyond this, a clear causal connection is evident in the impact of progressive education on Louie B. Felt. Also significant is the fact that in recent years the Primary has generally ended its emphasis on secular matters, such as social reform and charitable work for the entire community, and has devoted itself almost exclusively to religious studies, handwork, and self-improvement education.

The emphasis in this paper is on both continuity and change. The basic purpose of the organization—to provide a weekday religious educational experience—has remained constant, but the method and emphasis have changed. Originally, it seems, the Primary was a collective religious meeting with catechisms, poetry, and dialogues. The influence of progressive education brought about "grading," or the division into age-group classes, and social reform activities. Most recently, the oldest boys in the Primary have been involved in Boy Scout activities which parallel the self-help emphasis in the Merry Miss programs for the girls.

The expansion of the LDS church from a Utah to a national and recently an international church has brought in its wake numerous changes. Correlation of the Primary program with the programs of other Church auxiliaries and priesthood quorums is perhaps the best example. Another is the change in status of the organization's magazine, the Children's Friend, in 1971, to correlate with other English language and international Church magazines.

When little Saints of the Alpine Third Ward whispered and sang the sacrament meeting program in the early months of 1978, they blessed the congregation with a children's hymn older than anyone there:

I'll serve the Lord while I am young,
And, in my early days,
Devote the music of my tongue
To my Redeemer's praise.¹

The children could not have guessed that the very words they sang were once the seed of their Primary, a Church-wide association for Latter-day Saint children now flowering in its one hundredth year.

In 1853, a short time after Latter-day Saint Sunday Schools had been established in several Salt Lake City wards, Eliza R. Snow composed this verse as part of a "Juvenile Hymn." The coming of the Utah Expedition in 1858 put an end to the growth of Utah Sunday Schools, but the movement was reawakened in 1864 when George Q. Cannon reorganized the Salt Lake City Fourteenth Ward Sunday School. Two years later Cannon began publication of the *Juvenile Instructor*, a semi-monthly newspaper for little children, and within weeks of the first issue Eliza R. Snow became a conspicuous contributor. In addition to short essays on death, bad words, and the evils of candy, Sister Snow published a six-part series on the biblical story of Daniel, followed by a year-long continuous series titled "The History of Jesus." E. R. Snow, or E.R.S., as she was apt to identify herself, also carried on a correspondence (in prose and poetry) with various readers of the *Juvenile Instructor*—little Ernests and Eugeniass who for one reason or another had written to her.

But when Brigham Young issued a call to Eliza Snow in 1867 it was to organize women, not children. To assist bishops in organizing sisters in every ward and settlement in the territory was her commission. The Relief Society, too, was reawakening; the collective efforts of its sisters in the next two decades would not only bolster the Mormon economy but would involve women in Church programs and structure to a degree hitherto unknown, placing them in leadership positions at general, stake, and ward levels. With her substantial new administrative duties and travel, however, Eliza Snow did not forget her connection with the *Juvenile Instructor*. When she accompanied her brother Lorenzo Snow and other Church officials on a tour of Europe and Israel in 1872-73, she sent letters to editor George Q. Cannon describing the children's schools that she had visited: an "object school" in Paris and a kindergarten in Munich. She commented on the children's singing, marching, and work in crafts and observed how the schools relieved mothers of considerable responsibility for little ones who were "kindly cared for and trained by these skilful matrons."²

In the summer of 1878, when Eliza R. Snow encountered Aurelia Spencer Rogers, it was not surprising that they talked about children: Eliza had been a long-time teacher of boys and girls, and Aurelia had been mothering for more than thirty years. At twelve years of age Aurelia Spencer had helped her fourteen-year-old sister Ellen manage four younger Spencer children. Their mother's death in 1846, concurrent with their father's mission to Great Britain, had left the little family parentless for three years. After her father returned, seventeen-year-old Aurelia married Thomas Rogers in 1851. She was undoubtedly better prepared than most young girls would have been for the twelve children born to her and Thomas during the next twenty-three years, but nothing had prepared her for the pain she felt at the loss of five of them in early childhood. That, she admitted, was a severe trial of her faith, one resulting in stronger trust in God and heightened delight in her living children.³

Aurelia described herself as an "earnest thinker" who was "naturally of a religious turn of mind" and whose "forte would be to teach children." Consequently, in 1877, when Bishop John W. Hess of the Farmington Ward "called the sisters together, feeling that the young people were being led astray, and threw the responsibility upon the sisters to look after their daughters," Aurelia found herself wondering about the girls—and even more about the boys—and how parents could unite in training them.⁴

Thus, when Aurelia Spencer Rogers encountered Eliza R. Snow some months later in the summer of 1878, their conversation focused upon their common concern: the training of children. "Mrs. R. expressed a desire that something more could be effected for the cultivation and improvement of the children morally and spiritually than was being done through the influence of day and Sunday Schools," Eliza recalled.

"Sister E. R. Snow had suggested that ~~it would be well~~ for some good woman to take charge of them. Sr. Snow thought it would be proper, for Mothers can have the best influence with their children," Aurelia recounted.

"I asked Mrs. R. if she was willing to take the responsibility and labor on herself of presiding over the children of that settlement, provided the Bishop of the Ward sanctioned the movement," remembered Eliza Snow.

"When asked if I would lead out in this movement I felt that I could not refuse," said Aurelia Rogers.⁵

Eliza R. Snow, expert by this time in Church administrative procedures, knew that priesthood authorization was critical. After she had written to Bishop Hess and received his permission, hearty approval, and blessing, Sister Snow "informed Mrs. Rogers that she might consider herself authorized to proceed, and organize in Farmington."⁶ Securing the approbation of John Taylor, President of the Council of the Twelve and presiding officer of the Church at the time, Sister Snow proceeded to spread the movement to other wards throughout the territory, publicly announcing 15 August 1878 that the sisters planned "to inaugurate a system of Primary Associations" for "disciplining, educating and spiritually cultivating children."⁷

Sister Rogers was the first to organize, gathering Farmington parents together on 11 August 1878 two weeks before she convened their children for the first Primary. In Ogden, on 16 August 1878, three hundred children attended a meeting with their parents and enrolled in a Primary Association for that place. On 14 September 1878 Sister Snow organized a Primary in Salt Lake City's Eleventh Ward, and a week later three more Primary presidencies were sustained in the Salt Lake Stake, Relief Society sisters aiding in the work of organizing.

The Primary Association had been born. It came to be toward the end of a century during which Americans had shown new concern for children through emphasis on medical care for children, the enactment of child labor laws, and the establishment of children's aid societies and institutions for deaf and blind children. Most importantly for Mormon women, it came at the end of a decade when they had proven their ability to organize and work collectively as sisters. They were eager to take on the task of collective motherhood and to extend their nurturing outside the home into the church community. In this regard their concerns paralleled the "social housekeeping" efforts of their American counterparts. The founding of the Primary Association represented the conviction of Mormon women that they were best able to teach Zion's children, both within and outside of the home.

Though nineteenth-century Mormon Sunday Schools had
78 focused on the teaching of children and though many Mormon

women had been involved in the work, the Sunday School was male dominated, George Q. Cannon having been named general superintendent in 1867. The Primary, on the other hand, was conceived and controlled by women. Eliza R. Snow explained in 1880 that women themselves could organize Primaries without priesthood assistance, even though priesthood approval was requisite.⁸ From the beginning Sister Snow intended to make the Primary curriculum separate from that of the Sunday Schools. While the Deseret Sunday School Union published a first and second *Book for Our Little Friends* in 1879 and 1880, *Questions and Answers on the Life and Mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith* in 1882, and the *Deseret Sunday School Music Book* in 1884, Eliza Snow published her own counterparts for the Primary: *Children's Primary Hymn Book* in 1880 and the accompanying *Children's Primary Tune Book* in 1881, *Bible Questions and Answers for Children* in 1881, and *Primary Speakers*, numbers one and two, in 1882.

Sisters attempted to involve children as much as possible in weekly Primary meetings. Boys and girls echoed catechisms, recited poems, dramatized dialogues. Some even kept minutes and collected money. *Woman's Exponent* editor Emmeline B. Wells, speaking to those who considered Primaries unnecessary, declared that they "met a want that was not filled in the Sunday Schools. In these meetings the very young could express themselves to each other," she said, "the little ones feeling that these were their own meetings."⁹ During the 1880s sisters taught children to express themselves through the same means that women had come to know well. In the 1870s Latter-day Saint women had learned the art of public speaking and, not surprisingly, through the next decade they were concerned with their children's ability to speak extemporaneously and express their feelings regarding their organization. In Goshen the little Saints had their own manuscript newspaper, "The Morning Star." Mormon women's deep involvement in home industry was likewise made manifest through Primary fairs—displays of children's handiwork including quilts, embroidery, wool and paper flowers, stockings, braided rugs, nutmeg graters, ladders, hay racks, drawings, whips, and nose sacks, in addition to foodstuffs.

This handwork was not taught in nineteenth-century Primaries (though it was in later years), but simply reflected the work that

most children did at home. Displaying the products of children's home industry was one way to praise children for their economic contribution to the Kingdom, in much the same way that the sisters were being praised for their involvement in home industries and commission stores. Fairs and entertainments made money for the Primaries that needed to purchase books and wanted to contribute to meetinghouses, libraries, temples, the emigration fund, and the Deseret Hospital. Some Primaries collected Sunday eggs and gleaned and stored grain, activities common for local Relief Societies.

If Primary meetings reflected the interests of the sisters, they also reflected the fact that children had interests other than those of their mothers. Reports from the 1880s indicate that attendance averaged about half the number of children enrolled. The sisters, who had decided that they could most effectively discipline recalcitrant Mormon children, faced the reality of controlling from thirty or forty to over a hundred children. The little Saints were not divided into class groups; the three-member Primary presidency worked alone with a congregation composed entirely of children. In December 1880 members of the Salt Lake City Eighth Ward Relief Society were "exhorted to attend the children's primary and try and help Sister Fletcher keep the little ones quiet." That same year the Primary president of the Seventeenth Ward decided that maintaining order and interest was too much for the presidency and that "if the mothers could not take an interest in it, she felt it too much of a task, and wished to resign the position." Within a month she was released and both of her counselors resigned.¹⁰ Primary reporters to the *Woman's Exponent*, however, were much more apt to report on the orderliness of Primary children and their sweet affection for their leaders, who received from the children everything from flower bouquets and scriptures to locks of children's hair woven into memorial Primary wreaths.

The Primary Association, like the Church itself, experienced an era of transition through the 1890s. Upon the death of Eliza R. Snow in 1887 Louie B. Felt emerged more prominently as the Primary's general president. Sister Felt had actually been called and set apart for the position in 1880, but Sister Snow's reputation as the "presidentess" of the women's organizations of the Church and her particular interest in children and Primary had made any major

administrative involvement of Louie Felt unnecessary. Apparently Louie had benefited from Eliza's coaching, and one co-worker noted that the death of the older, more experienced woman was a real loss to the younger woman (thirty-seven years of age) now called upon to direct the organization in its second decade.

Louie Bouton Felt had not enjoyed the same close association with leading brethren that had marked the twenty-year administration of Eliza Snow. Louie had grown up in the Church, but far removed from its Salt Lake City headquarters. For years after their baptism the Bouton family had remained in Norwalk, Connecticut, finally coming to Utah in 1866. Louie had married Joseph H. Felt a few months following their arrival. After some hard years in the Muddy Mission the Felts had settled in Salt Lake City's Eleventh Ward, where Louie had served as a Sunday School teacher and ward Primary president and held positions in the ward and stake Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association. But even had Louie Felt known well the leading brethren of the Church, she assumed the full weight of her position during an era that made them unavailable for substantial guidance and counsel. The Edmunds-Tucker Law, enacted in 1887, strengthened legal provisions for prosecuting polygamists. John Taylor died in hiding in 1887; and shortly after an appearance at October conference in 1887 Wilford Woodruff, new head of the Church, likewise left for the underground. Louie herself traveled to the eastern states on two occasions so that her husband could avoid prosecution as a polygamist.

As President Woodruff issued the Manifesto in 1890 and the dust stirred by the raid settled, Louie Felt attempted to sound a more certain trumpet for ward and stake Primary leaders who for several years had run their local programs without central leadership. An annual conference of Primary workers was introduced in 1889, and, when the second such convened in October 1890, President Felt reiterated the need for sisters "to attend to the spiritual education of our children." The Free Public School Act passed by the Utah Territorial Legislature in February 1890 forbade the inclusion of Latter-day Saint doctrine in the secular curriculum of public schools, and President Felt and others sensed that the work of the Primaries must take on new importance.

As keenly as sisters felt their responsibility to fill the need for religious education—met for many years through the incorporation of Mormon theology in public school curriculum—Church leaders did not turn to the Primary organization to fill that need. Rather, under priesthood leadership through the LDS General Board of Education they established separate weekday religion classes, theological classes for children of elementary school age to be held at the end of the school day.¹¹ The choice to inaugurate a new program (and thus introduce an overlap of function that became obvious in later years) may indicate that President Felt was not in close communication with the presiding brethren and/or that she and the women's program for children had not yet won their confidence. Certainly, in 1890, in spite of Louie's desire to issue a clarion call, both she and the program were floundering.

Primary curriculum was not to change substantially until the turn of the century. The books Eliza R. Snow had written for the Primaries were reissued through the 1890s and the Primary fairs continued, but local associations were already casting about for new curriculum. One of six general board members commented, after visiting ward Primaries, that "the work in some associations appeared to be growing monotonous."¹² Some Primaries had already moved toward different subject matter. The Box Elder Stake proudly reported in 1894 that they had taken up the study of Joseph Smith and natural history. As early as 1893, stake officers meeting together requested that the Primary publish a magazine, but the First Presidency told the women "to give up all idea of a paper for the present."¹³ The general board did suggest new books for Primary use, most notably the "Primary Helper" compilations by William A. Morton, but these did not begin to satisfy the need for a stronger, more unified program. Added to the curriculum crisis, the sisters faced a credibility crisis. One stake officer reported that "in many of the wards the Bishops were not interested" in Primary work, and a board member commented that "generally their [Primary sisters'] labors were not appreciated by the Bishops and Stake authorities."¹⁴

Perhaps for fresh insights and perhaps for relief, Louie Bouton Felt turned her attention and energies to the Salt Lake City Eleventh Ward Primary Association, and out of her experience there came the new direction that would serve the Primary for the next several

decades. Sister Felt had served as president of the ward organization since September 1878, when Eliza R. Snow had organized it as the second Primary Association in the Church, and she had continued her tenure, with a few short interruptions, in spite of her call as general president. Eleventh Ward Primary exercises and entertainments were well known and frequently featured in the columns of both the *Woman's Exponent* and the *Juvenile Instructor*. One ward associate recalled that "President Felt was beloved by officers and children alike. She was continually studying up some thing that would be of benefit or interest to the children."¹⁵ The Eleventh Ward kindergarten represented one such venture into new ideas.

In 1892 the Sunday School began training teachers in new techniques through a normal training class at the Brigham Young Academy, and by 1894 they had established some model Sunday Schools. Perhaps these activities piqued Louie's interest in further training for herself. In any case, she went after it—not at the Brigham Young Academy in Provo, but at the First Congregational Church in Salt Lake City. There Alice Chapin—a teacher trained in Boston by Elizabeth Peabody, the founder of the first American kindergarten—had opened a training school for kindergarten teachers as well as a model kindergarten. Since the 1880s the kindergarten movement had been gaining popularity among various Jewish and Christian women in Utah. American kindergartens were popularly concerned with the moral culture of young children, so classes were often sponsored by churches and usually held in connection with classes for mothers.

Attending the class with Louie was her close personal friend and ward Primary counselor and general board secretary, May Anderson. What the two learned from Alice Chapin they inaugurated together in the private kindergarten they established within the Eleventh Ward. The class consisted of thirty-one children ranging from three to six years of age. The Felt-Anderson kindergarten experiment ran for two years; May Anderson then continued the work on her own for an additional two years.

The effect of the kindergarten class was immediately apparent in the grading of the Eleventh Ward Primary. Utah schools had begun grading students early in the 1870s and the Sunday School

had followed suit: by 1883 the Salt Lake City Fifteenth Ward Sunday School boasted some thirty-six classes. The Primary program had never required a graded system, since for the most part meetings had consisted of poems, songs, recitations, dramatizations, and catechisms. But exposure to a new curriculum for the child—one that included greater activity and more opportunity for the individual child to discover and participate—convinced Sisters Felt and Anderson that a graded system offered more opportunities for children of all ages. Consequently, in 1896 they called in young women to serve as aides and divided the children in the ward Primary into three classes according to age and placed them in separate rooms.

Convinced that the Eleventh Ward Primary could serve as a model for local wards, the Primary general board immediately recommended that all ward Primaries be graded as the first step toward implementing a stronger Primary curriculum. Then, as the new century approached, Louie B. Felt confidently shared with *Woman's Exponent* readers her vision of a new education for Zion's children:

We have much to be grateful for to Pestalozzi and Froebel and many others who have filled our own and our children's lives with pleasures and experiences of object lessons, and the Kindergarten. . . .

And as the care of children is woman's special charge, the new century will see much advancement and many things which today are in the experimental stage will be proven and tested, and whatever is unworthy will be cast out.¹⁶

The trumpet may have had a more certain sound, but the troops were in disarray: some had moved forward; others had fallen back. The Primary in Salt Lake City's Fifteenth Ward had coordinated two grades almost a year before the Primary officially announced the change in grouping format. By 1900 that ward was following a regular program of opening exercises followed by separation into three classes: one dealing with the life of Christ, another with the Old Testament, and the third with the life of Joseph Smith. An officer representing the Panguitch Stake, on the other hand, reported in April 1896 that the Primaries there had not been graded "because it was not understood, [and she] desired to get

some information on the subject.”¹⁷ There was no official line of communication from general to ward level, except for limited visits by the presidency and six general board members and an annual conference for stake officers. The Primary was the only Church auxiliary without a regular publication. Whereas a decade earlier Relief Societies, YWMIA, and Primaries had been inseparably connected, now these auxiliaries, as well as the YMMIA and the Sunday School, were increasing in autonomy. Primary programs were no longer an offshoot of Relief Society programs; and the Primary was badly in need of a means by which to make its own statement of identity.

That opportunity came in 1901 when at long last the Primary general board was given approval to publish its own monthly bulletin for teachers, the first issue of which appeared in January 1902 as the *Children's Friend*. Approval was not granted for funding, however, and Sister Felt pledged her house as collateral on the sisters' dream. Now the grading process could be clearly understood by all as the lessons for three grades were set forth. Early lessons dealt with biblical and Church history topics, but the old catechisms were gone and in their place came stories and thought questions. In 1906 more than fifty percent of the sixty-four hundred Primary officers subscribed to the *Children's Friend*.¹⁸

By the time the Primary Association embarked upon its fourth decade in 1909, the *Children's Friend* contained lessons for five grades in addition to providing sections within the magazine for girls, boys, parents, and officers. That same year priesthood advisers were appointed to work with the Primary general board, whose membership had increased to twenty-four. Regular visits of these sisters to stakes were financed through a nickel fund collected annually from children and officers in local wards. Such evidences of organizational vitality had a minimal effect upon the little Saints, however: 73.6 percent of Latter-day Saint children were enrolled in the Primary program in 1909, and 47.5 percent of those enrolled attended—about the same percentage as in the 1880s.¹⁹

Nevertheless, over the next few years the commitment of Louie Felt and May Anderson to the principles of the progressive education movement was not without happy effect upon Primary children. Sister Anderson's work with the Eleventh Ward kindergarten had

been followed by four years with kindergarten work at the University of Utah. She resigned her university position to become editor of the *Children's Friend* in 1902, but she took with her the influence of the great proponents of child-centered education. John Dewey, G. Stanley Hall, Francis W. Parker, and Marietta Pierce were all quoted in the *Children's Friend* at one time or another. Increasingly, the magazine focused upon building a meaningful educational experience for the child by making interest the motive for his work, by using teachers as guides rather than as masters, by giving attention to the child's physical development, and by emphasizing the need for cooperation between school and home.

In 1913 the Primary introduced a new curriculum conspicuously rooted in the progressive philosophy. The four weekly meetings during the month were designated respectively lesson hour, story hour, busy hour, and social hour. Lessons for the former continued to be based on gospel topics with scriptural substance. For the second hour, stories and storybooks such as *Tom Brown's School Days*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and *Little Women* were selected to develop the child's taste for good literature and sharpen his ability to choose between good and evil. Acquainting boys and girls with everyday skills was the purpose of the busy hour, and every fourth week found classes spring cleaning, washing dishes, chopping kindling, and making everything from beds and curtains to cardboard boxes. The social hour provided time for marches, games, and folk dances; but little Saints playing "Catch the Cane" and "Going to Jerusalem" were not to be allowed to get out of order. By the end of 1915 the percentage of children enrolled in Primary had not changed, but attendance had risen to sixty-three percent.²⁰

While the use of this plan of distinctive "hours" did not last many years, the interest in the movement for progressive education determined the thrust of the Primary for decades to come. Classes changed and separate programs were introduced for boys (Trail Builders) and girls (Homemakers). Handwork and play remained essential aspects of the Primary program. As late as 1940 general board member Marion Belnap Kerr—who had herself studied with John Dewey—wrote an article for the *Children's Friend* entitled

The Primary's interest in the world's philosophy of education reflected a larger movement among Latter-day Saints away from the Kingdom-building separatist attitude of the nineteenth century toward greater involvement in the political, social, and economic life of the United States. During Louie Felt's administration Primary workers were influenced by other aspects of American progressivism—particularly the emphasis on social reform. In an article prepared for the American Red Cross in 1921, a general board member described the Primary Association as “an association perfected for the purpose of assisting in the spiritual, ethical, economical, and physical betterment of children” which “fosters state and community child welfare movements” and “supports and helps to promote legislative movements to secure enactment and enforcement of proper educational and health laws.” The article explained that the 60,700 children enrolled received weekly moral and religious instruction and were “taught to express ideals by means of handwork, dramatization, games and folk dances.” The handwork—“thousands of articles, made largely from old materials”—reportedly taught moral lessons, encouraged creative genius, and developed economy and thrift. Primary handwork had been funneled into the war effort of 1917 and 1918; during that time Primary sisters and little Saints had made and donated approximately 120,000 articles to the Red Cross. At other times the handwork was sold in annual fairs and bazaars, the proceeds helping to finance local associations and to support the Primary's major social welfare project: the care of crippled children, “gratis regardless of creed.” The 1921 report indicated that through such donations the Primary maintained a children's ward in Salt Lake City's Groves LDS Hospital (a project then in its tenth year) and that thanks to this source of funding a large convalescent home and day nursery in the city was near completion (a facility which opened in 1922). In addition, the article reported, the Primary “is active in and gives financial support to [the] Social Welfare League of Salt Lake City, also free clinic and free milk stations,” and “seeks the further establishment of more and better playground facilities.”²¹

By the time seventy-five-year-old Louie B. Felt resigned from the presidency in 1925, the Primary Association was no longer the fumbling organization that she had first undertaken to lead, but an

organization of considerable stature within the Church and the community. Like other American women who led out in "social housekeeping" activities at the end of the nineteenth century, Mormon women learned, as they extended their influence beyond their homes into the Church and community sector, that their programs were more effective when integrated into existing, usually male-administered—and in the case of the Church, priesthood-administered—systems. In the 1920s, as priesthood and auxiliary leaders worked to correlate Church programs, the Primary Association emerged with fiscal and administrative responsibility for the same program of education, activity, and child welfare that Louie Felt and May Anderson had nurtured so carefully for three decades.

When May Anderson was sustained as general Primary president in 1926 she was already thirty-five years into her Primary career. A Scottish lassie who had arrived in Salt Lake City in 1883, May had quickly developed a close personal relationship with Louie B. Felt. In 1890 May Anderson was sustained as secretary to the Primary general board, and the next fifty years of her life were given over to this work. Free of the responsibilities of husband and family, May worked full-time in the Primary office, one of few salaried workers there. Louie Felt and May Anderson (so inseparable that they were once called the David and Jonathan of the Primary) had done their innovating in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The fifteen-year term of President Anderson—or Superintendent Anderson, as she chose to be called—was characterized by the institutionalization of the Primary program she had partnered building.

The first handbook for Primary officers and teachers was published by the general superintendency and board in 1930. Practical religion, ethics, economics (handwork), play, and sociology (social life) were canonized as the Primary's official field of activity. Stages of a child's development were carefully catalogued and the need for corresponding age-group divisions emphasized. The Seagull program for twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls had been introduced in 1922, followed in 1925 by a program for boys ages nine through eleven. "The Trail Builders song came new to us that year," Salt Lake City's Wilford Ward recorded. "All boys in the Trail Builder classes were in one group and . . . the boys began to make their

treasure chests.”²² The Bluebird girls (named for Maurice Maeterlinck’s symbol of happiness) were organized in 1926. By the time the handbook was published, the old five-grade program had been expanded into twelve classes to which the general board had attached not only names but colors, mottoes, symbols, and uniforms. Elaborate operettas and dramatizations were suggested as activities which incorporated several Primary concerns. One sister recalled these as glorious occasions for children and parents when

costumed children presented well prepared dances. Artificial flowers decorated the halls and there was always a may pole. . . .
“Grandmother’s Old-Fashioned Garden,” “The Land of Happy Hearts,” “Come to Health Land” were some of the productions.²³

The Primary, however, was not the only Church agency that had gained in size and stature during the early years of the twentieth century. Other Church auxiliaries were likewise expanding; and the vying of these growing institutions one against another was inevitable, since many of their interests and responsibilities were beginning to overlap. Superintendent Anderson was called upon to battle for the Primary program—and with all the conviction of a thirty-five-year Primary veteran, battle she did. To the office of the Primary presidency she brought a reputation for bluntness. One co-worker, who had expected to encounter a “dictatorial and unbending ‘old maid’ ” when she met May Anderson, instead discovered her to be a woman “whose first thought was always for the welfare of the children of the Church,” regardless of the inconvenience or difficulty she might cause parents, teachers, and other associates.²⁴ A look at Sister Anderson in her fighting posture provides a glimpse of Primary women defending their role as the appropriate teachers of Zion’s children.

In May 1929 Joseph F. Merrill, commissioner of LDS education, proposed that the overlap between the course work of the weekday Religion Classes and the weekday Primary classes could be avoided if the Primaries carried out religious instruction for those of elementary school age only, eliminating the senior religion classes. Junior seminaries, under the direction of the Church department of education, would see to the religious instruction of students of junior high school age, eliminating the Primary’s instruction for

girls twelve to fourteen. May Anderson's response centered around the Primary's concern for its ten thousand Seagull girls: "We are well equipped to continue to give these girls religious instruction and to provide for them such social activities as are necessary and suitable."²⁵ The result of the clash was that the junior seminaries were to give the girls their religious instruction while the Primaries were to provide their activities. In 1934 the responsibility for these older girls was given to the YWMIA, a proposal to which May Anderson first objected but later supported as the decision of the Brethren.

Medical care for children became another area in which the interests of the Primary Association were in conflict with those of other Church organizations. In 1922 the Primary began providing convalescent care for children in a large, twenty-five-bed home located north of Temple Square in Salt Lake City. Within a short time the professional medical staff at the home began to perform minor surgery there, and it came to be known as the Primary Children's Convalescent Hospital. Little Saints had already begun marching to the tune of a "penny parade" so that their contributions could help needy, afflicted children. In 1932 three LDS hospitals—in Salt Lake City, Ogden, and Idaho Falls—suggested that all children who were surgical patients should be sent to the LDS hospital in Salt Lake City. Again, Sister Anderson argued against the proposal on the grounds that it would be detrimental to the children. She declared that the Primary Association had moved from its ward in Groves LDS Hospital "because of the inability of this institution to give the service required for such children." She argued that the First Presidency, recognizing some virtue in the sisters' request for a separate facility for children, had "generously allowed the Primary general board use of the building now known as the LDS Children's Hospital." Besides, she maintained, it would be more economical if children's surgery were performed at the children's hospital. "In our Children's Hospital there is opportunity for Sunday School, Primary, Day School, moving pictures, play and playthings, pets, outdoor where there is plenty of freedom for games, noise, etc. In short, it is and should be more so a combination of hospital, home, school and Church." The Presiding Bishopric deferred to May Anderson on economic grounds; but the LDS hospital later arranged to do surgery

as cheaply as the children's hospital, so the young surgical patients were sent there until the Primary completed a new children's hospital in 1952.²⁶

Further study of stake and ward Primary leaders may indicate that they experienced a similar conflict of auxiliary interests. Evidence suggests, however, that local leaders were more anxious to eliminate some parts of the Primary program than to defend the elaborate whole. In the months preceding her release at the close of 1939, May Anderson pled with her board to move toward "modification and simplification rather than elimination" of certain activities. But when stake Primary superintendents were polled in the early months of 1940, nearly half of them affirmed that "too much material was planned."²⁷

The institution flowered and bore impressive fruit during Sister Anderson's administration, but the task of pruning fell to her successor. A sharp contrast to May Anderson, May Green Hinckley had no Primary experience when she was sustained as Primary general president in 1940. Office manager, missionary, and for twelve years president of the Granite Stake YWMIA, Sister Hinckley had just returned from the Northern States Mission with her husband Bryant S. Hinckley when President Heber J. Grant called her to preside over the Primary.

The close personal relationship between the Hinckleys and President Grant boded well for this administration, although it was unfortunately cut short by Sister Hinckley's death in 1943. Her three years as Primary president, however, were marked by more conspicuous cooperation between Primary and priesthood leaders. A chart in the 1942 handbook, for example, emphasized that ward, stake, and general Primary leaders served the child under the direction of bishoprics, stake presidencies, and General Authorities. Further, bishops and Primary leaders were instructed to work together closely in preparing Primary's eleven-year-old Trailbuilder Guides to receive the Aaronic Priesthood at age twelve. An expanded ward Primary conference replaced the traditionally elaborate spring festival, becoming the new culmination of yearly Primary activities. "Leisure activities including music, literature (poetry, stories, dramas), arts and crafts, play games and dances," which had previously taken two of every four Primary meetings,

first counselor in the new general presidency of the Primary Association.

Assigned to work with the *Children's Friend*, Sister Howells immediately began infusing its pages with more of the children. A "What is Your Hobby?" section featured the correspondence of little Saints such as Guena Vere Allen, age 10, of Circleville, Utah, who described her hobby of collecting advertisements. Through the 1940s other Mormon children wrote to say that they loved to read, play hopscotch, raise pigeons and rabbits, ride horses, and collect everything from stamps and dolls to animal ornaments. Their poems, stories, and artwork were soon published in the "Our Young Writers and Artists" section, and incidents and excerpts from their family histories appeared in "Diaries of Long Ago." The magazine even provided space for little Saints to retell favorite Bible stories in their own words. So did Zion's children become visible in the monthly magazine that came through the mail with a two-cent stamp pasted never very neatly on the back. Beginning in 1946, a weekly radio broadcast and later a television program featured Primary children and dramatized stories from the *Children's Friend*. Both were instituted by President Adele Cannon Howells.

"Very generous, and very gracious" was the description one of her cohorts offered of Sister Howells.³⁰ A continued close relationship with President Heber J. Grant was punctuated with her frequent hand-delivered gifts, to him and others, of homemade bread. She also sponsored luncheon meetings for Primary stake presidents and their boards. Primary priesthood advisers and general board members were regularly hosted at her northern Utah ranch. Wherever possible, it seems, she funneled the amenities of her own affluent life (including the assistance of a reliable housekeeper) into her Primary callings. And she encouraged each little Saint to similarly touch the Church and community through a gift of self. The nickels of Primary children paid for murals in the Idaho Temple baptismal font painted by prominent artist Lee Greene Richards. (Sister Howells herself commissioned Arnold Friberg's renowned Book of Mormon scenes, which appeared in the *Children's Friend* in 1952.) Following World War II she volunteered Primary officers and children to help provide aid to European Saints. Sisters prepared baby layettes and little Saints contributed toys and clothing enough

to fill thirty-five hundred boxes. With her encouragement ward Primaries throughout the Church planted trees on Church grounds and in city parks during Utah's 1947 pioneer centennial. Many of these same Primary children, invited by Sister Howells to contribute a dime to "buy a brick," raised nearly \$20,000 toward a new Primary Children's Hospital. Another \$120,000 was raised under the direction of Sister Howells and her board as one thousand silver dollars contributed by President Heber J. Grant in 1938 were individually sold to enthusiastic donors. Most of Sister Howells's innovations were short-term projects with lasting effects not so much upon the Primary program as upon the children themselves; but the new hospital, dedicated in April 1952 a year after the death of Adele Howells, was long-lived.

"We'll never fill this hospital," said LaVern Parmley, as she helped transfer wide-eyed little patients from the old convalescent home to their beautiful new rooms and beds at the Primary Children's Hospital.³¹ By 1966, however, she had overseen the addition of a floor to the east wing and the building of a whole new wing to the west. Having served for nearly ten years as a counselor first to Sister Hinckley and then to Sister Howells, LaVern Watts Parmley was called as general Primary president in May 1951. At that time 157,223 children were under her direction. Two decades later she was still serving, but the number of Primary children had nearly tripled. The growth of the hospital was indicative of the growth of the Primary and, indeed, of the Church itself.

LaVern Watts grew up in Murray, Utah, on her father's farm. There she weeded beets, played ball with her eight brothers, and found privacy in the apple orchard with a salt shaker and a good book. After six years of school-teaching she married Thomas J. Parmley in 1923 and, when he had completed his doctoral work at Cornell University in 1927, they settled permanently in Salt Lake City. With three children of her own still underfoot Sister Parmley was called to the Bonneville Stake Primary board. Trail Builder boys aged nine, ten, and eleven became her specialty. She was sought out by Sister Hinckley to help revise the boys' program and was then called to the general board in 1940.

The program for boys continued to receive Sister Parmley's special consideration throughout her presidency. In fact, when she

standardized administrative assignments for three-member Primary presidencies on general, stake, and ward levels, she apportioned the boys' program to Primary presidents. The work had expanded enough to demand the increased attention. The Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association had affiliated with the Boy Scouts of America in 1913; and in 1953, sometime after the Scouting age was lowered from twelve to eleven, the First Presidency asked Primary leaders to assume responsibility for the eleven-year-old Scouts. The sisters reworked their program to fill both priesthood preparation and Scouting needs and in doing so became the nation's first female Scout patrol leaders. Sister Parmley herself eventually became one of the first women to serve on national Scouting committees and to receive the Silver Buffalo, the highest Scouting award and one previously reserved for men. At the same time the Primary was asked to sponsor Cub Scouting in ward neighborhoods.

The Scouting program was not easily incorporated into the growing number of foreign Primaries. Special mission lessons, instituted during the 1930s when the Primary program first made its way into the missions, had been eliminated in favor of the regular curriculum as more and more missions became stakes. Now the regular Primary curriculum had to be made to accommodate international needs. Sister Parmley recalled visiting wards and stakes in the western United States where men asked her why the traditional Trail Builder song had been changed. "When the Church started going abroad," she said, "no boys out there wanted to sing, 'Out West where the sunsets glow,/Where the brooks flow down like silver/From the heights of the virgin snow.' And so we had to change our song."³²

Internationalization demanded a simpler and more consolidated program from Church headquarters. The movement toward "priesthood correlation" during the 1960s emphasized the auxiliary status of the Primary and other Church organizations. Under the direction of the presiding priesthood—that is, the First Presidency and the Quorum of Twelve Apostles—auxiliaries were to help carry out a coordinated Church program for adults, youth, and children. At the end of 1970 the Primary published its last issue of the *Children's Friend*; the Church magazine for children, the *Friend*,

appeared in 1971. By 1971 the Primary curriculum, once prepared and published by the general board, had been replaced with a "correlated program for the children," to be in part administered and taught by Primary sisters. As a further indication of growth, when Sister Parmley had first entered the Primary presidency in the 1940s she had been able to have personal contact with all 147 stake Primary leaders; by the time she was released in 1974 the Primary presidency and general board were able to visit only 30 of the Church's 273 regions (comprised of two or more stakes).

The consolidation of Primary programs into a broader Church plan culminated with the announcement in September 1974 of the sale of the Primary Children's Hospital to a private health corporation. Though the hospital had long taken pride in its ability to serve children from outside Utah and the United States, the presiding Brethren had determined that it and the fourteen other Church-owned and -operated hospitals in the intermountain region did not furnish adequate health care to worldwide Church membership. Monies such as those collected in the annual Primary Penny Parade would thenceforth be funneled into local hospital care and health education throughout the Church's wards, stakes, and missions. "When I think of the hours and the service . . . and the interest that I've had in these children that have been there . . . I have the feeling that I have lost something that is very, very precious to me," Sister Parmley commented after the announcement of the hospital's sale. But, she added, "if that's the decision of the Church then of course I support it."³³

Much that was precious—even central—to the work of Primary sisters was not removed in the wake of correlation. When Naomi Maxfield Shumway was called as sixth general president of the Primary in 1974, sisters and little Saints continued to gather for a weekday program of songs and lessons that was not markedly different from that of preceding years. A quiet, unassuming woman, described by her associates as "almost regal," Sister Shumway took in hand a program in which she was well experienced, one that was in her view "essentially the same" as that discussed by Eliza Snow and Aurelia Rogers nearly a century earlier. Originally these sisters had hoped to unite parents in training their children in spiritual matters.

96 Now, as the Primary undertakes a second century, its purpose still,

according to Sister Shumway, "is to 'support the parents' in helping their children 'walk uprightly before the Lord.'" ³⁴ However, while in 1878 the Primary shared its interest in Zion's children with only the Sunday School, in 1978 the Primary Association is part of a comprehensive Church program for children. Committees for children's curriculum, music, and the monthly magazine (the *Friend*); curriculum for handicapped children; parenting lessons for the Melchizedek Priesthood and Relief Society (with supplementary material in the monthly adult magazine, the *Ensign*); family home evening lessons for parents and children—all have been developed to build the foundation of Zion's future.

For President Shumway the Primary Association is a vital part of this foundation. It has a fully developed program to teach reverence, it can reach every child regardless of his or her family's membership or activity in the Church (often Primary children bring the gospel into their parents' lives), and it is flexible at the local level where teacher and child interact. "The needs of children are still the same as they were a hundred years ago," says President Shumway, "even though they might now be met in different ways. Primary is just in more places with more children."³⁵

What happened to the Primary Association as it grew from hundreds of children clustered in Utah's valleys to nearly half a million children scattered worldwide parallels the growth of departments within most large institutions. The movement from experimentation to standardization of programs, the impact of current trends, the difficulty of meeting the needs of an increasingly larger and more varied population, and the struggle to increase accordingly rather than to lose responsibilities and influence are not unique to the history of the Primary. More distinctive has been the long-term commitment of Primary sisters at every organizational level to interpret the gospel and the Church for children, and their concomitant concern with interpreting the children's needs to Church leaders and parents. Though this study has for the most part focused on the general Primary officers, their efforts at "interpreting," or teaching and administering, raise some questions that apply to all Primary workers and associates:

—Why have celebrations of the Primary centennial centered around the grassroots efforts of Aurelia Spencer Rogers?

–What does Louie B. Felt tell us about the effectiveness of a woman who seeks out her own knowledge of children and then tempers or pilots programs accordingly?

–Like May Anderson, do women need to take a stand on programs or policies that they feel may be detrimental to themselves or those whom they serve, with the view that they are not obstructionists but faithful stewards with valuable input who will abide by the final decision of those in authority?

–Are children most effectively taught by women who involve them in what the women themselves are learning? Learning, for example, to contribute to the Church economy through managing its resources well, as did nineteenth-century sisters? Or learning to extend themselves through personal sacrifice to and involvement in collective welfare efforts such as the Primary Children's Hospital?

–Does a priesthood leader–Primary leader relationship based on accessibility and mutual respect (such as that exemplified by Eliza R. Snow and John Taylor or Adele Cannon Howells and Heber J. Grant) encourage a more creative and active stewardship than more distant priesthood-steward relationships?

–Finally, men have become increasingly involved in planning for children on the general Church level. If the Primary is to serve as an auxiliary to the home and a support to parents, to what extent should wards and stakes involve men as well as women as both teachers and administrators within the Primary? But such involvement will be another chapter in the history. Certainly the first hundred years belong to sisters and little Saints—sisters who have felt their strength as resources vital to the kingdom and have taught little Saints to appreciate their own worth and potential as sons and daughters of God.

Notes

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9. "Home Affairs," *Woman's Exponent* 8 (15 January 1880):124.
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26. General Superintendency, Primary Association to Presiding Bishopric, 7 June 1932, General Board Minutes, 15 June 1932; also General Board Minutes, 27 September 1933.
27. General Board Minutes, 18 October 1938 and 20 March 1940.
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The Salt Lake Temple: A Symbolic Statement of Mormon Doctrine

C. Mark Hamilton

Like all religions, Mormonism has its symbols. Anyone visiting a Mormon meetinghouse with its lack of paintings or other obvious symbolic representations might assume that Mormonism is generally void of outward representation of that symbolism. Symbols abound even there, however, being evident in the relationship of the cultural (i.e. recreation) hall to the chapel and in the inclusion of a Scout room, a kitchen, and a Junior Sunday School chapel. All of these bespeak a family-centered religion.

Perhaps the one place in which Mormon doctrinal symbolism is most evident is in the construction of temples built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In them one finds lavish murals and decoration in the various rooms, symbolic representations such as the all-seeing eye, and ornate altars. Even in the outside configuration and sculpture of the buildings one finds symbols important to the religion of the Latter-day Saints.

In the following essay, Dr. Mark Hamilton, Brigham Young University architectural historian, has analyzed the symbolism of the exterior of the Salt Lake Temple. Where the Mormon chapel invites all to enter, the temple is a secluded place from which the message of the restoration goes forth and to which the faithful gather for sacred instruction. The temple is, in Hamilton's words, a "personal sanctuary where heaven and earth are joined as one" and the only place in Mormonism which would qualify as sacred space.

Under the guidance of Joseph Smith, the early years of Mormonism constituted a period of doctrinal solidification.¹ This developmental stage was visually expressed in the architectural motifs of the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples; both buildings were basically conceived as meetinghouses in the traditional sense of general assemblage. It was not until the proposal came for the Salt Lake Temple that an LDS building was designed from the outset to restrict attendance to those who could conform to prescribed doctrinal standards of the Church. The function of housing general assemblage was to be relegated to a building designed specifically for that purpose, while the Salt Lake Temple was to function as a sacred space exclusively.

This change from mixed usage to sacred space corresponds to the initiation of the complete temple ceremony. Joseph Smith first instructed his closest associates in the ordinances of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods on 4 May 1842.² Until that time, the Nauvoo Temple's basic configuration had changed little from that of Kirtland's, except for a full basement and half stories above the side aisles. This indicates that the Prophet did not have a full understanding of the spatial requirements necessary for the enactment of the temple ordinances at the time of the release of the temple plans in the early part of 1841. Otherwise, the plans would probably have been altered to better facilitate the temple liturgy.

The foundation doctrines of the Church were understood at the time of Joseph Smith's death where they had not been fully solidified at the time of the inception of the Nauvoo Temple. Thus Brigham Young, having the advantage of a complete knowledge of the temple ordinances and the physical and spatial requirements they entailed prior to his proposal for the Salt Lake Temple, conceived his design solely as sacred space. In the October general conference of 1860, President Young called for the building of meetinghouses to function separately from the temples.

We have often told you that we want to build a temple [Salt Lake]. . . . I inform you long before you see the walls reared and the building completed, that it will be for the purposes of the priesthood, and not for meeting in it. I should like to see the Temple built, in which you will see the priesthood in its order and true organization, each Quorum in its place. If we want a larger building than this Tabernacle for public exercises, here is the ground already planned, and has been for years. . . . The Temple will be for endowments—for the organization and instruction of the Priesthood.³

The Salt Lake Temple, because it functioned strictly as a temple, assumed an added importance in the community. Its sacred nature and geographical location were integral to the Mormon doctrine of gathering, and together they gave it its rank as the physical symbol of Mormonism. It was so important that "every pioneer community was located and oriented to the temple [Salt Lake] as the center of Zion."⁴

The concept of gathering was revealed to Joseph Smith on 6 April 1836 when, in company with Oliver Cowdery, he received

from the hands of Moses the "keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north."⁵ This doctrine of literal gathering required that there be a physical place to which people could gather. Missouri was designated as that place; but due to the Saints' expulsion from that state and later from the temporary site of Nauvoo, Salt Lake City became the alternate place of assemblage.

The Great Basin region was seen as the place of gathering in preparation for the Saints' eventual return to Missouri to establish the prophesied New Jerusalem. The Saints' removal to this area was no mistake. As early as 1834,⁶ the Prophet Joseph spoke of the Saints' withdrawal to the Rocky Mountains and persisted in this belief to his martyrdom.⁷ Brigham Young, upon assuming the leadership of the Church at Joseph's death, continued in the thought of establishing his people in the protection of the mountains. Their direction came from a belief in Isaiah's prophecy of a literal gathering of the Lord's people to the "top of the mountains."

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.⁸

Central to Isaiah's prophecy was the "house of the God of Jacob." To Mormons, this refers to the temple, where one is taught the fulness of the doctrines of Christ and receives the ordinances necessary to dwell with God.

Your endowment is to receive all those ordinances in the House of the Lord, which are necessary for you, after you have departed this life, to enable you to walk back to the presence of the Father, passing the angels who stand as sentinels, being enabled to give them the key words, the signs and tokens, pertaining to the Holy Priesthood, and gain eternal exaltation in spite of earth and hell.⁹

It is significant that the Salt Lake Temple was designed from the outset to function solely in the capacity of sacred space, for it

was there that God could dwell within walls dedicated for that purpose. In the words of Hugh Nibley, "it is now generally recognized that the earliest temples [Kirtland and Nauvoo] were not as formerly supposed, dwelling-places of divinity, but rather meetingplaces at which men at specific times attempted to make contact with the powers above. . . ." Interpretively, the Salt Lake Temple became as the mountain of ancient times, for "the mountain itself was originally such a place of contact between this and the upper world."¹⁰ The combined presence of the Temple and the established headquarters of the Church (with a prophet at its head to provide continued communication with God) appears to satisfy Isaiah's prophecy. In fact, in reference to Isaiah, the temple has become more than the physical symbol of Mormonism—it has become the spiritual ensign to the world.

The siting of the temple on the east-west axis of Temple Square places it at right angles to the north-south axial movement of this enclosure. Thus, even when seen at its most picturesque angle, the temple exerts no compelling outreach to bring one in line with its entrance nor any visual suggestion to approach the structure. The sanctuary walls project the feeling of enclosure but do not function to draw one in. A broader perspective of Temple Square and the Salt Lake Temple, however, reveals a more comprehensive siting and symbolic program that reaches beyond the ten-acre sanctuary. It will appear that Young selected the temple site with the prophecy of Isaiah in mind.

The geographical location of Salt Lake City fulfills Isaiah's requirements for "mountain" in two translations, the first being literal and plural and the second figurative and singular. The literal can be represented by the adjoining Wasatch and Oquirrh mountain ranges that reach out to draw in those who have sought the security of the Salt Lake Valley with its temple. (The temple itself, of course, is the "mountain" in the figurative sense.) Whether in fulfillment of prophecy or by coincidence, the assemblage of the natural with the man-made has created an appropriate place for the gathering spoken of by Isaiah.¹¹

Once vectored to the temple and within the protective walls of Temple Square, the individual is removed from the external environment of the real world to one of seclusion. The picturesque

view of the temple is not coincidental, as might be the scenographic layout of the Salt Lake Valley. Brigham Young saw the temple as the place from which the "law shall go forth" and as the compendium of Mormon belief. In the original plans he made provisions for the temple to incorporate numerous symbols that functioned with medieval complexity to speak of the order of God, Christ, the restoration of his gospel, man's relationship to him, and the proclamation to the world of his reality. President Young's theological statement was all-encompassing when compared to Joseph Smith's embryo program of moon-stones, sun-stones, and star-stones on the Nauvoo Temple.

Though Young demonstrated a keen interest in astronomy and went so far as to have an observatory built atop his Beehive House, he was probably not solely responsible for the complexity of the temple's iconographic program. The individual most capable of such a theological statement was Orson Pratt (1811–1881). He was a professor of astronomy at the University of Nauvoo¹² and later at the University of Deseret (now the University of Utah) in Salt Lake City.¹³ He was competent not only in astronomy but also in other areas, including Hebrew.¹⁴ On 11 November 1850 he received international recognition in advanced mathematics for his analytical discovery of the law governing planetary rotation. He published his first book on mathematics, *Pratt's Cubic and Bi-Quadratic Equations*, in 1866 while in England, and the distinguished astronomer Richard A. Proctor said of Pratt that he was one of the four "real mathematicians in the world." In England again during 1879, he published the authoritative work *Key to the Universe*, along with his discovery of what he believed was the date for the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recorded in the chronology of the floor lines in the Grand Gallery of the Great Pyramid of Gizeh.¹⁵

The Saints knew of his brilliance in astronomy through a series of twelve open lectures which he gave on that subject during the winter and spring of 1851–52.¹⁶ He held similar lectures in the early part of 1871. His later discourses attracted such large crowds that they were held in the Tabernacle.¹⁷ A member of the Council of Twelve Apostles, he devoted most of his time to the Church. When not on one of his seven missions to England and Europe or one of at

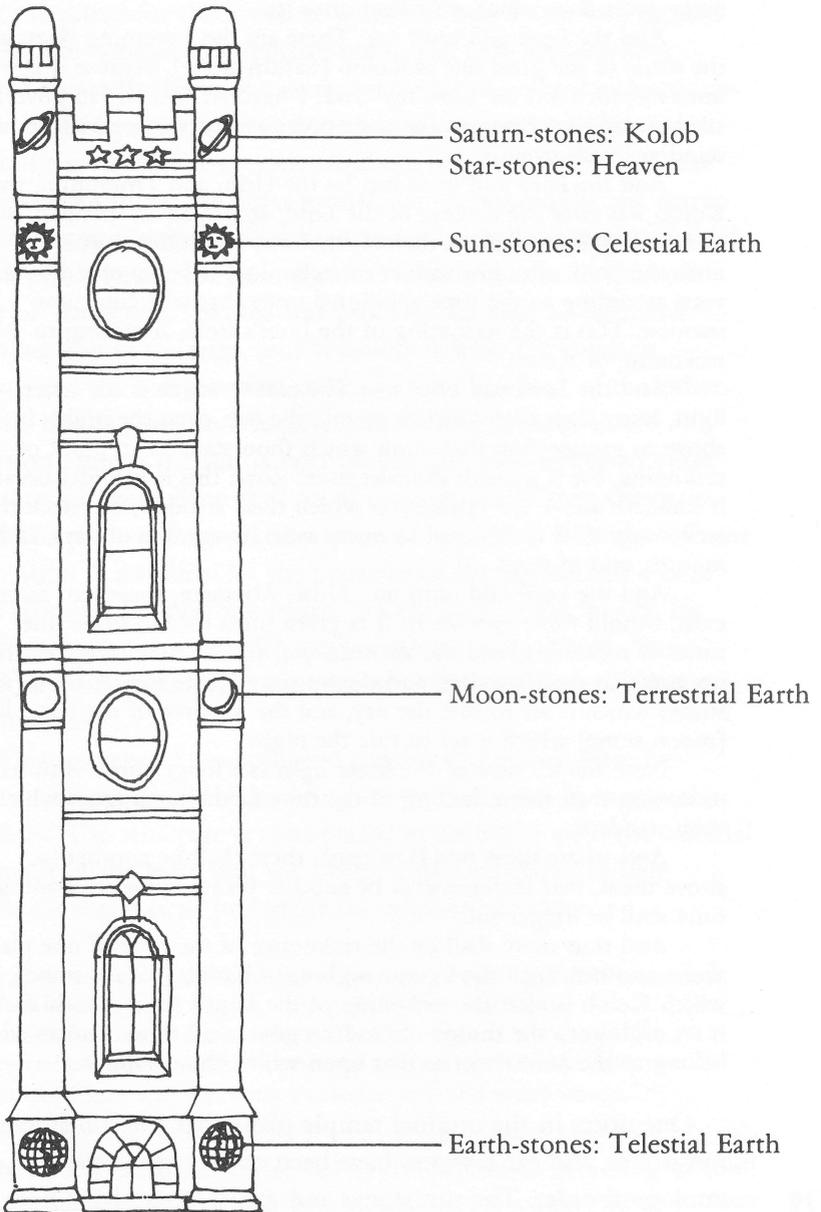
least another eleven in the United States, he spent his time attending to his studies.¹⁸ In 1869, an astronomical observatory of wood and adobe was constructed specifically for him on the southeast corner of the Temple Block; fittingly, it faced the southeast corner of the temple. It was equipped with the instruments he had brought from Nauvoo and those supplied by the United States Government so that he could make more accurate observations and measurements.¹⁹

To date, there are no recorded accounts of shared knowledge between Young and Pratt over the symbolism of the temple, even though they often discussed doctrinal matters. It is safe to conclude, however, that President Young was aware of Pratt's investigations and their eternal implications. It is important to note that Pratt had completed his lecture series just before the first temple plans appeared in 1853 and that a brief text of the contents of the lecture was published in the *Deseret News* a year later while the temple plans were still in preparation. In 1874, architect Truman O. Angell, Sr., spoke of the symbols and defined some of their meanings.²⁰ This came on the heels of Pratt's 1871 lectures, which were printed in full in the *Deseret News* of that year.²¹ Orson Pratt's appointment as Church historian in 1874 brought him even closer to the office and affairs of the Church.

There was never a time in the history of the Church when its members were so well informed on matters of astronomy. At the same time, there was never a people better prepared to understand and appreciate the iconographic programs on the temple than they. Today their significance is lost in a period when such symbols are of little supposed value. In order to unlock their meaning, one must have an understanding of Mormon doctrine, practice, and scripture, along with the information given by Angell, Sr., a study of the temple plans, and insights from the works of Orson Pratt.

The purposeful arrangement of the Saturn-stones and star-stones at the highest point on the wall buttresses and the parapet represents the heavens. The idea of heaven is supported by Nibley's observation that the temple's "crenelated walls and buttresses are familiar from the oldest monumental temples as the 'pillars of heaven.'"²² The descending placement of the sun-stones, moon-stones, and earth-stones completes the symbolism of the established order of God's creations and their relationship to the reckoning of

FIGURE ONE
Symbolic Stones of Side
Buttress System



time. An explanation is found in the Mormons' Book of Abraham, translated from the original Egyptian papyri in Joseph Smith's possession from 1835.²³

And I [Abraham] saw the stars, that they were very great, and that one of them was nearest unto the throne of God; and there were many great ones which were near unto it;

And the Lord said unto me: These are the governing ones; and the name of the great one is Kolob [Saturn-stone], because it is near unto me, for I am the Lord thy God: I have set this one to govern all those which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest [earth-stone].

And the Lord said unto me, by the Urim and Thummim, that Kolob was after the manner of the Lord, according to its times and seasons in the revolutions thereof; that one revolution was a day unto the Lord, after his manner of reckoning, it being one thousand years according to the time appointed unto that whereon thou standest. This is the reckoning of the Lord's time, according to the reckoning of Kolob.

And the Lord said unto me: The planet which is the lesser light, lesser than that which is to rule the day, even the night, is above or greater than that upon which thou standest in point of reckoning, for it moveth in order more slow; this is in order because it standeth above the earth upon which thou standest, therefore the reckoning of its time is not so many as to its number of days, and of months, and of years.

And the Lord said unto me: Now, Abraham, these two facts exist, behold thine eyes see it; it is given unto thee to know the times of reckoning, and the set time, yea, the set time of the earth upon which thou standest, and the set time of the greater light [sun-stone] which is set to rule the day, and the set time of the lesser light [moon-stone] which is set to rule the night.

Now the set time of the lesser light is a longer time as to its reckoning than the reckoning of the time of the earth upon which thou standest.

And where these two facts exist, there shall be another fact above them, that is, there shall be another planet whose reckoning of time shall be longer still;

And thus there shall be the reckoning of the time of one planet above another, until thou come nigh unto Kolob [Saturn-stone], which Kolob is after the reckoning of the Lord's time; which Kolob is set nigh unto the throne of God, to govern all those planets which belong to the same order as that upon which thou standest.²⁴

One notes in the original temple plans that the sun-stones, moon-stones, and earth-stones have been set in their respective cosmological order. The sun-stones and moon-stones have been

programmed to illustrate the computation of the earth's time. The fifty-two weeks it takes for the earth to make one complete revolution around the sun, marking one solar year, are represented by the individual rays of light set about the circumference of each of the fifty sun-stones. The twenty-nine and one-half days (29.53, to be precise) required for the moon to complete one revolution around the earth are symbolically represented in the fifty moon-stones arranged about the exterior circumference of the temple: the moon-stones are grouped in fours and are sculptured to depict the four phases of the moon—new moon, first quarter, full moon, and last quarter—establishing the lunar month. Correspondingly, the thirty-four earth-stones were to have been shown at various stages of axial rotation, had the temple been finished with an easily sculptured veneer of "freestone." Saturn was probably selected to represent Kolob because of its rings, which readily display the rotation necessary for the computation of God's time and that of the other heavenly bodies. The time required for Saturn to make one revolution around the sun is twenty-nine and one-half earth years, the numerical equivalent in years of the number of days the moon requires to make one revolution around the earth.²⁵ The idea of time and rotation is solidified by the presence of the constellation Ursa Major (the Big Dipper) sculptured on the west center tower. Its pointer stars are oriented with near accuracy to the North Star—historically the symbol of the center of time and the revolution of the universe.²⁶

This concept of cosmological order is continued into the cardinal orientation of the building on its north-south, east-west axial lines. The structure is thus placed in harmony with the celestial movement of the earth and the other heavenly bodies. Nibley remarks on the ancient precedent for orienting temples:

The root *tem*—in Greek and Latin denotes a "cutting" or intersection of two lines at right angles, "the point where the *cardo* and *decumanus* cross," hence where the four regions come together, every temple being carefully oriented to express "the idea of pre-established harmony between a celestial and terrestrial image."²⁷

Such harmony is further expressed in the deliberate grouping of the moon-stones as well as in the very procedure by which the

priesthood is to lay out temples. Explanations of these symbolisms demonstrate clearly that the Salt Lake Temple is a microcosmos—a scale model of the universe.²⁸

In 1878, a plan of the temple's exterior walls was drafted expressly to plot the exact location of each of the fifty moon-stones according to lunar phase, month and year. This was determined by observations made that year in anticipation of the next season's building program, when the moon-stones were to be laid. The lunar sequence begins on the north wall with the fifth buttress from the northwest corner tower (designated as buttress two on the plan) and continues in a clockwise movement around the fifty buttresses of the temple. The sequence logically ends with the point of starting—more specifically, between the new and first-quarter moons of buttresses four and five from the northwest corner tower (designated as buttresses two and fifty-one on the plan.) The plan specified *fifty* moon-stones in order to create a sequential break to establish the beginning point of the lunar cycle.

The same clockwise progression is seen in the correct order in which temples are to be laid out. As explained by Joseph Smith:

If the strict order of the Priesthood were carried out in the building of Temples, the stones would be laid at the southeast corner by the First Presidency of the Church. The southwest corner should be laid next. The third, or northwest corner next; and the fourth, or northeast corner last. The First Presidency should lay the southeast corner stone and dictate who are the proper persons to lay the other corner stones.

If a Temple is built at a distance, and the First Presidency are not present, then the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles are the persons to dictate the order for that Temple; and in the absence of the Twelve Apostles, then the Presidency of the Stake will lay the southeast corner stone; the Melchizedek Priesthood laying the corner stones on the east side of the Temple, and the Lesser Priesthood those on the west side.²⁹

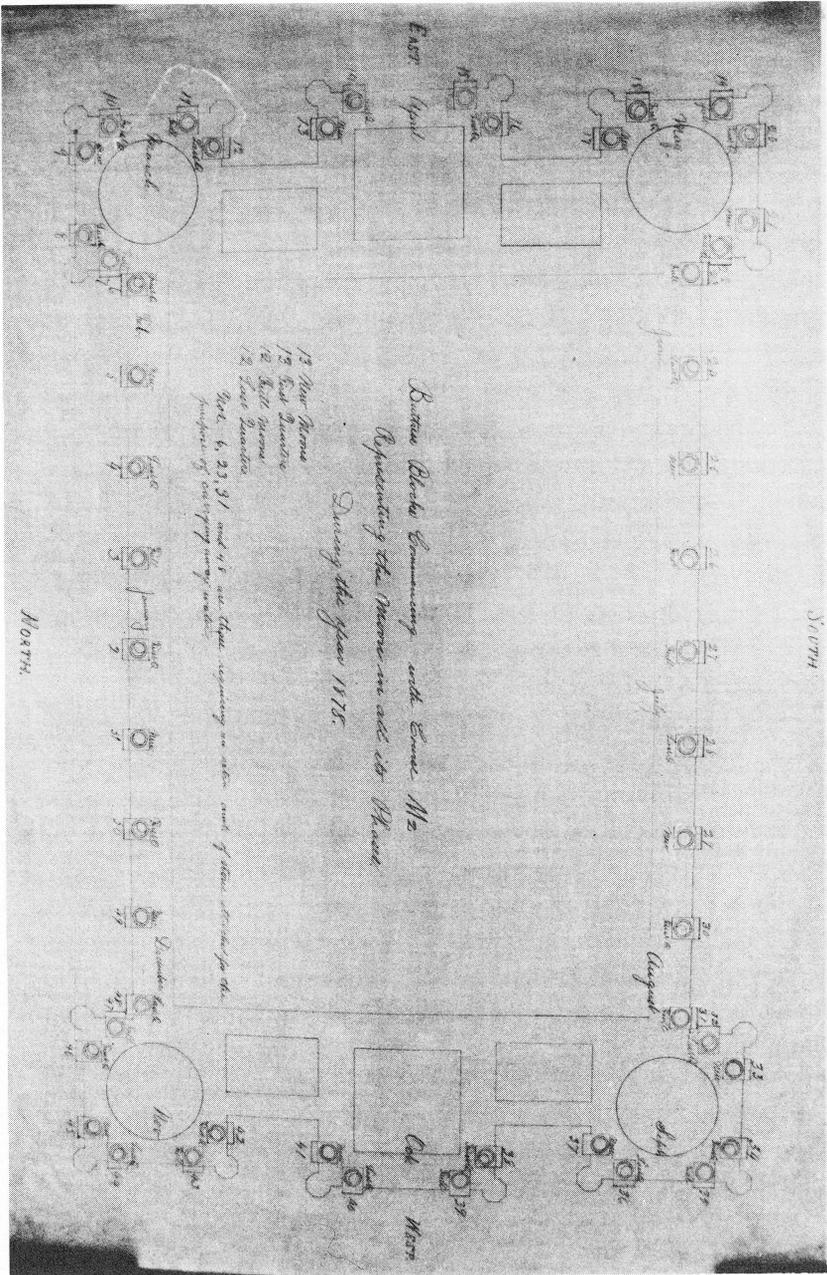
On 6 April 1853, Brigham Young had the Salt Lake Temple laid out in this prescribed order. Nibley astutely observed in his book, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, the marked similarity between the order in which Mormons and Egyptians lay out their temples. He noted that President Young, after the laying of the cornerstones of the Salt Lake Temple and

while offering the dedicatory prayer over the southeast cornerstone of the Manti Temple, made specific references to light.³⁰ With the Salt Lake Temple, he spoke of light in both physical and spiritual terms. The geographical location of the temple being in the northern hemisphere required that the southeast cornerstone be laid first because "there is the most light." As a fact, the sun does rise from the southeast and first illuminates the east and south fabric of the building.³¹ Symbolically and spiritually, the Melchizedek Priesthood and particularly those ordained to the office of apostle in that priesthood after the order of the Son of God are the givers of light—hence the flames on the finials of all the corner buttresses. It is therefore appropriate that the two east cornerstones are set by that priesthood. Of most importance is the symbolism attached to the east façade, particularly the central tower, which is representative of Christ, the Author of Light.

The clockwise movement of the representational stones on the exterior of the temple is attuned to the movements of the sun and moon. Together with their vertical ordering and the axial orientation of the building, the stones symbolize an established internal order with Christ as its center—an order which is concentric with the order of God.³² Central to the established theme of cosmic order is Christ and his gospel as the means whereby man can become part of the celestial order.

In harmony with the 1878 plan, Percy L. Myer translates the lunar cycle into the corresponding months of the Gregorian calendar. Beginning with the moon-stone on the fourth buttress, representing the moon in its new phase, and moving clockwise with each successive four moon-stones carved to represent one lunar cycle of approximately twenty-nine days, the fourth grouping (buttresses thirteen through sixteen on the plan), representing the fourth lunar month of the Gregorian calendar, flanks the east center tower. The fourth lunar month of thirty days (an extra day must be added to compensate for the fractional half-day)—between 30 March and 28 April—is of most importance to Mormons. He points out that on the fourteenth moon-stone on the north front buttress of the east center tower, the moon is appropriately represented in the first quarter phase while the moon-stone on the south front buttress of the east center tower shows it in full phase. The significance is their implied dates.³³

FIGURE TWO
Sequence of Moon-stones,
1878 Plan



... The new moonstone 13, on the north side of the east center tower indicates the date, March 30th. And now, when we call to mind that there are usually seven or eight days between successive phases of the moon as represented on the moonstones, we can reasonably assign dates to the moonstones indicating the other phases. Therefore, since the moonstone 13, on the north side of the east center tower, indicates the date March 30th, the one on the right front buttress of the tower reasonably represents a date seven days later. This date is found to be April 6th, the sixth day of the fourth month in our modern manner of reckoning.

This is the month and day on which the prophet Joseph [Smith] organized the Church of Jesus Christ, in accordance with the commandment given by revelation. This is the month and day on which the House of the Lord [Salt Lake Temple] was commenced and completed.³⁴

In reference to the significance of 6 April, an appropriate inscription was placed above and between the fourteenth and fifteenth moon-stones and their buttresses.

HOLINESS TO THE LORD
THE HOUSE OF THE LORD
Built by the Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints
Commenced April 6, 1853
Completed April 6, 1893

The placement of the inscription is fitting in regard to the previously discussed concept of light; for when the actual rays of the morning sun strike the gold intaglio letters, they stand out with definition from the gray-white granite. The brilliance of the gold letters seems to further symbolize the central importance of Christ and the temple, his house—a house of order.

Myer continues in his attempt to define a pre-latter-day iconography that testifies to the Old and New Testament reality of Christ. To accomplish this, he switches from the Gregorian to the Jewish sacred calendar. The reason for the change was the date of 14

April, for moon-stone 15 has no symbolic significance to Mormons. Moon-stone 15 is the first full moon after the vernal equinox in the month of Abid or Nisan, the first month of the Jewish sacred calendar. Abid is the month of the Passover—specifically, the month of the Paschal Moon, which is the moon under which the Israelites found favorable light to flee from Egypt. To the Christian, it is also the month of the Lord's Last Supper, his crucifixion, and his ultimate atonement for the sins of mankind. Myer takes the ten sun-stones on the east façade to mean the tenth day of the month of Abid, which he interprets to be the day on which Christ was born, thus correlating it with the date of 6 April.³⁵ This interpretation is compatible with the calculations of Orson Pratt.³⁶ With the same reasoning, he considers the organization and possible symbolism of the center tower of the west façade. Using the established month of Abid as a guide, he places this tower within the month of Tisri or Ethanim, the seventh month of the Jewish calendar. Again using the ten sun-stones of the façade, he looks to the tenth day of that month for meaning. He finds in Leviticus 23:26–32 a reference to this very day and month as the one in which the Lord required his people to observe the Sabbaths.

Still looking to the first and seventh months of the Jewish sacred calendar, he equates the fifteen sun-stones along the buttresses of the south and north walls with the respective days of these months and uses Leviticus 23:6–8 and 23:33–36 to determine that they were the days on which the Lord required his people to observe the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Tabernacles.

Concluding with the fifty sun-stones that encircle the temple, Myer counts fifty days from the Passover Sabbath (the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread) and, using Leviticus 23:15–16 as a source, finds the day on which the Lord asked that a meat offering be made to him. To Christians, this is the Day of Pentecost referred to in Acts 2:1–40.

Though speculative and open to criticism and revision, Myer's observations fit within the known iconographical program of the temple. To conclude with the Day of Pentecost, the date on which the Lord took leave of the earth, is consistent with the next symbolic program on the temple, which tells of the restoration of his gospel and the reestablishment of his kingdom.³⁷

The restoration of the gospel is symbolized by the statue of the angel Moroni set atop the spire of the center tower of the east façade. He is depicted as the herald spoken of by John the Revelator.

And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.³⁸

According to Mormon belief, the announcement of the impending restoration of the gospel of Christ, as symbolized by the angel Moroni atop the east center spire, was soon followed by the restoration of the priesthood. This priesthood is administered by authorities who direct the Church through the established doctrine of divine and continued revelation. The six-tower/spire configuration is emblematic of this authority on earth and therefore presides in architectural complexity over the temple. The east tower grouping is purposely six feet higher (210 feet total) than that on the west, representing the Higher or Melchizedek Priesthood, which is the authority to preside over the spiritual affairs of the Church. Its three towers represent the presiding authorities: the President of the Church and his two counselors. They are also symbolic of the local stake leadership: the stake president and his two counselors.³⁹ The twelve finial spires atop the corner buttresses of each tower represent the Twelve Apostles and their local jurisdictional equivalents. The west towers, being lower (204 feet) in elevation, represent the Lesser or Aaronic Priesthood. Its three towers are emblematic of the Presiding Bishop and his two counselors and their local equivalents.⁴⁰

The east-west hierarchy of the two priesthood orders is consistent with the requirements for the laying of the cornerstones previously discussed.⁴¹ The only inconsistency lies in the interpretation of the twelve finials. Truman O. Angell, Sr., mentioned that the finial spires of the east and west tower groupings represent the Twelve Apostles. Knowing that the office of apostle is part of the Melchizedek Priesthood, one wonders why there are finials on the west towers representing the Aaronic Priesthood.

There is certainly more to the cardinal orientation of the towers than just the symbolism of the order of the two priesthoods. It seems logical to assume that there is a similar distinction to be made between the apostles of the eastern and western hemispheres. The east finials would correspond to the original Twelve selected by Christ during his Palestine ministry; the west would be emblematic of the Twelve chosen by the Savior during his brief ministry among the Nephite peoples of the Book of Mormon in the western hemisphere prior to his ascension. The basis of this assumption would be the Mormon belief in the seniority of ordination and appointed responsibilities of these first quorums.⁴²

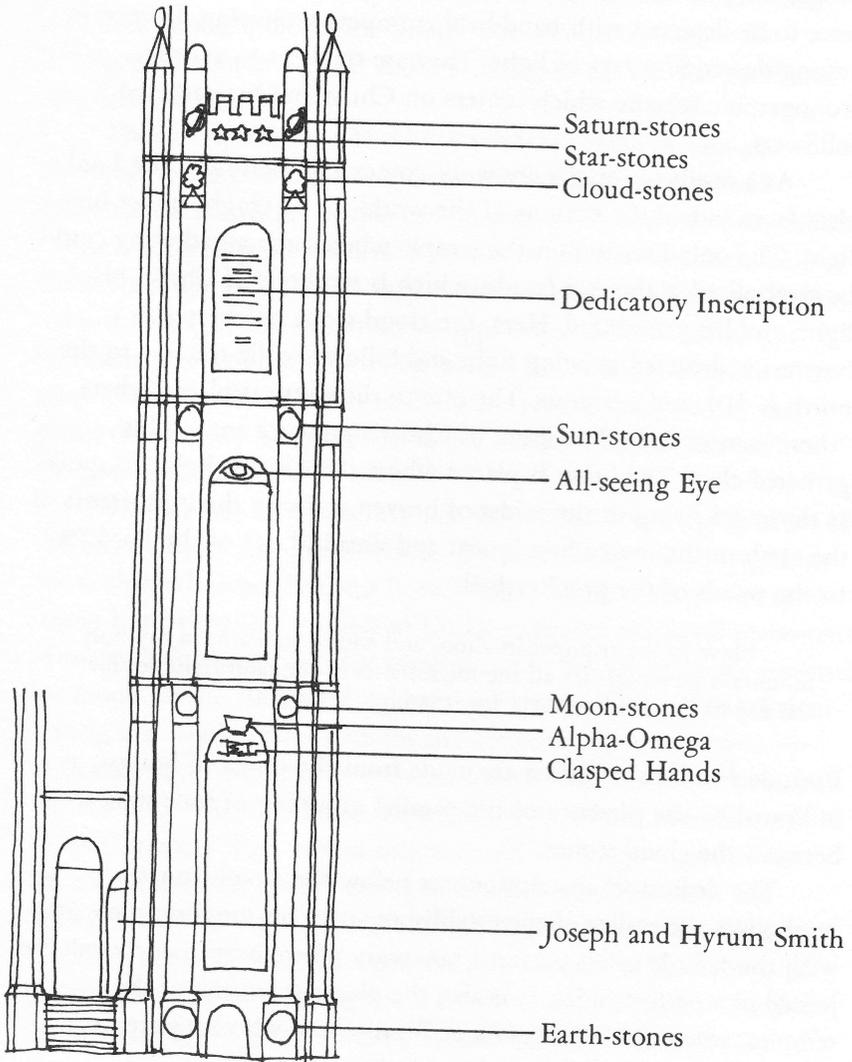
And he said unto me: Thou rememberest the twelve apostles of the Lamb? Behold they are they who shall judge the twelve tribes of Israel; wherefore, the twelve ministers of thy seed shall be judged of them; for ye are of the house of Israel.

And these twelve ministers whom thou beholdest shall judge thy seed. And behold, they are righteous forever; for because of their faith in the Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood.⁴³

It is appropriate that the higher east finials represent Christ's first chosen apostles, befitting the order of their selection and ordination, while the shorter west finials represent the second quorum, thus giving primacy to the first chosen.

Subsequent to the restoration of the priesthood authority and the founding of the Church was the commission by the Savior to take the gospel to all the inhabitants of the earth. As observed from the original temple plans, there were to be cloud-stones with descending rays of light placed just below the caps of the inside buttresses of the four corner towers. They represented the gospel being taken to the four corners of the earth, "to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." They were "emblematic of the gospel light piercing through the clouds dispelling the clouds of superstition and error which had engulfed the world."⁴⁴ It is significant that they were placed on the priesthood towers, because missionary work is a function of the priesthood and because the four corner towers were statements of the four corners of the earth with the center towers being a statement of the priesthood authority.

FIGURE THREE
East Center Tower



The missionary concept is in harmony with the iconography of the constellation Ursa Major on the center tower of the west façade. It is the symbol of the priesthood, of those ordained of the Lord and sent to administer "to the Lost" who "may find their way by the aid of the priesthood." These inhabitants of the earth are symbolized by the earth-stones which are the reciprocal emblem to the cloud-stones, with Ursa Major as the intercessor symbol.⁴⁵

The cloud-stones on the east center tower are not part of the program represented on the west façade. In the original plans, they were to be depicted with hand-held trumpets projecting downward among descending rays of light. They are the keys to another iconographic scheme which centers on Christ and his gathered followers.

As a result of missionary work comes a gathering of the Lord's elect from out of the nations of the world, to be taught under his light. The only location on the temple where such a gathering could be symbolized is the east façade, which is symbolic of Christ, his light, and his priesthood. Here, the cloud-stone on the south buttress is depicted as being light and billowy while the one to the north is dark and ominous. The one to the south is placed where "there is most light," to speak of Christ's presence among his gathered elect. The other is placed where there is less light, to speak as the angel flying in the midst of heaven warning the inhabitants of the earth of the impending "great and dreadful day of the Lord."⁴⁶ In the words of the prophet Joel:

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain [temple]: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.⁴⁷

Both declarations of Christ are made from the midst of heaven, as indicated by the presence of the parallel grouping of four stars set between the cloud-stones.

The dedicatory inscription, set below the cloud-stones, symbolizes the reality of the establishment of his kingdom on earth, with the temple as his personal sanctuary where heaven and earth are joined in a perfect order. It is also the place, as are any of the temples, where the inhabitants of Zion—those who are pure in heart—can gather and be taught of light and truth.

... Literally the House of the Lord ... a house where He and His Spirit may dwell, to which He may come or send his messengers, to confer priesthood and keys and to give revelation to his people.⁴⁸

Beneath the previous symbols and in descending order from heavenly to earthly is the so-called all-seeing eye. It is set in the arch of the second major window of both façades. This ancient motif has multiple applications, but in reference to Mormon doctrine its translation is found in the Books of Psalms and Proverbs.⁴⁹ The first is consistent with the concept of divine protection afforded those who seek to make God their friend. The second concerns the omnipresent nature of God and his ability to discern the good and evil deeds of man.

The inscription "I AM ALPHA AND OMEGA" on the keystone of the first major windows reaffirms Christ's eternal existence on which his people can lay their faith and be strengthened in their knowledge of his divinity.⁵⁰ Set in the window arch, below the inscription, is the hand-clasp motif. It, like the all-seeing eye, is ancient in origin and has multiple applications. To Mormons, it represents the hand of fellowship within the external context of the gospel. This marks the shift in the iconographic program to the present-day reality of Christ—to man's relationship to man within the gospel of Christ.⁵¹

Only by way of conjecture can the reasons for the placement of the bronze figures of Joseph Smith, Jr., and his brother, Hyrum, in the sculptural niches be considered. Their elevation above the earthstones but below the symbols of Christ suggest a medieval placement of martyrs. Joseph Smith, the instrument by whom the Lord restored his gospel to the earth, and his brother, Hyrum, demonstrated their willingness to give their lives for the Church; this was viewed by Mormons as a testament to their followers of its truthfulness and of the reality of Christ. Within the niches, they would have become historic symbols from whom others could receive strength, at the same time forming a vital iconographic link between earth and heaven. The Church, however, had the figures removed from their niches in 1911 and placed on granite plinths on the lawn south of the temple in order to bring them closer to the visitors to Temple Square. Historical plaques were attached to the monuments to explain the contributions made by the two martyrs.⁵²

The earth-stones terminate the descending program. As mentioned by Angell, Sr., they were to be seen collectively as the dwelling place for man.⁵³ This might seem a most naive conclusion to make at this juncture; but it must be explained that Mormons believe that the earth, in its present state of progression, is the lowest of God's creations. It also symbolizes the lowest of God's kingdoms of reward. Its placement in the iconographic scheme is both appropriate and fitting to the position of mortal man who now must look heavenward.

Man, as a mortal, is now placed in the position of having to make a decision. The iconographic program to this point has taught him his own origins, the order of God, the reality of Christ and his mission of redemption, and the restoration of his Church and priesthood in this present day. It is, then, his responsibility to determine by his acts which kingdom he will inherit. On the fifty flat buttresses of the temple is expressed in symbols the potential of man's reward in the life after death. The assembled earth-stones, moon-stones, and sun-stones are now to be read vertically as representing the varying kingdoms of worthiness or reward. The earth—or, in Mormon vocabulary, the telestial kingdom—is the lowest; the moon, or terrestrial kingdom, is the middle; and the sun, or celestial, is the highest kingdom. What might appear to be a discrepancy in this interpretation is actually not;⁵⁴ for even though the glory of the telestial kingdom in Mormon theology is likened unto the brightness of the stars, the earth can be given that designation also. Reference to the earth as the telestial kingdom is based on the Mormon belief that the earth must pass through a series of stages in order to be exalted. With the fall of Adam, the earth also assumed a fallen or telestial state. At the Lord's second coming, the earth will be cleansed to usher in the millennial era and begin a terrestrial state. The Millennium will close with a "short period" in which Satan will be loosed, after which the earth will die, only to be resurrected and receive its celestial glory. It then will become a fit abode for those who once lived on the earth and have earned the celestial order. This explains why the star-stones on the temple can be placed even above the sun-stones to represent the heavens, while at the same time the earth can be designated as the telestial kingdom.⁵⁵ The ultimate truth of this interpretation is

upheld in the liturgy of the temples. Doctrinally, in a vertical reading the earth-stones, moon-stones, and sun-stones translate into the telestial, terrestrial, and celestial kingdoms of reward and the stages of the earth's progression, assuming a double meaning. The iconographic scheme has now gone full cycle to establish a prescribed order.

When taken as a whole, the temple with its geographic location and its iconographic program can be seen as an overall established order concentric with the order of heaven. Integral to this order is the relationship between God and man. The intended program of the building is to aid man in his quest to gain entrance back to the presence of God from whence he came. The temple is literally a compendium of Mormon belief.⁵⁶

Notes

1. Brigham Young et al., *Journal of Discourses*, ed. George D. Watt et al., 26 vols. (Liverpool, England: F. D. and S. W. Richards, 1854-86), 19:8-20. (Hereinafter referred to as *JD*.)
2. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1946), 5:1-2. (Hereinafter referred to as *HC*.)
3. *JD*, 8:202-3.
4. Hugh Nibley, "The Idea of the Temple in History," *Millennial Star* 120 (August 1958):232-36.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 124:38-42. (Hereinafter referred to as *D&C*.)
6. Ivan J. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1967), p. 441, n. 41.
7. *HC*, 5:85-86.
8. Isaiah 2:2-5.
9. *JD*, 2:31-32.
10. Nibley, p. 231.
11. Isaiah 2:2-3.
12. Elden J. Watson, comp., *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City: Elden J. Watson, 1975), p. 144. W. W. Phelps (1792-1872), an early Mormon writer, was also very interested

in astronomy, as was evidenced by his Salt Lake City Almanacs; they were dated for the specific years of their distribution but were also computed from the time of the Church's organization on 6 April 1830.

13. Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ms., LDS Church Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, 14 January 1871. (Hereinafter referred to as Journal History, Church Archives.)
14. Watson, pp. 74-75.
15. N. B. Lundwall, comp., *Wonders of the Universe* (Salt Lake City: N. B. Lundwall, 1937), pp. ix-x. For further information see footnote 25 of this essay.
16. Ibid.
17. Pratt gave his lecture series on astronomy on the following dates: 17, 18, 24, 27, and 31 January and 2, 6, 9, and 16 February 1871. See Journal History, Church Archives, for those dates.
18. N. B. Lundwall, comp., *Masterful Discourses and Writings of Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1960), pp. 8-9, 18-22.
19. *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 September 1909; *Salt Lake City Deseret News*, 14 November 1931, 23 November 1935.
20. Truman O. Angell, Sr., "The Salt Lake City Temple," *Millennial Star* 36 (May 1874):273-75.
21. Refer to note 17.
22. Nibley, p. 236.
23. In 1835, while at Kirtland, Ohio, four Egyptian mummies of the Coptic period came into the possession of Joseph Smith. They were purchased by the Church from a Michael Chandler who had inherited them from his distant uncle, Antonio Lebolo, of Italy. It was Lebolo who had acquired the mummies at the time of their excavation from a pit tomb near Gernah, Egypt, sometime between 1819 and 1821. Two of the papyrus scrolls found with the mummies were said to have been written by Abraham and Joseph (Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1975], pp. 3-7; *HC*, 2:348-50). Sometime after 1874, the original Saturn-stones were removed from the temple

plans and the pre-existent circle frieze below the parapet stringcourse on the six towers were then referred to as Saturn-stones. They do not, however, fit as well into the iconographic program as did the original stones (Angell, Sr., p. 276).

24. Abraham 3:2-9.
25. "Key to the Universe" in Lundwall, *Wonders of the Universe*, pp. 225-332. Pratt thought of Saturn as the most "wonderful" of the known planets and described its orbit as "magnificent." He devoted nearly one complete lecture to Saturn (Ibid., pp. 129-41). On the plans of the temple Saturn is shown with only two rings, which is consistent with Pratt's lecture and the knowledge of the planet at that time. Professor Richard A. Proctor (1837-1888), a contemporary of Orson Pratt and familiar with his pioneering work in astronomy, wrote extensively on the relationship of the planet Saturn and the Jewish Sabbath. His observations were based on the Jewish lunar calendar compared with the solar calendar used by the Egyptians and other ancient cultures of that region. This is interesting in light of the Saturn-stones and lunar cycle used on the Salt Lake Temple. It is also important to note that he linked Saturn with the cosmological program of the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt. This is in harmony with Pratt's observations and the cosmological program of the Salt Lake Temple (*The Great Pyramid* [London: Chatto & Windus, Picadilly, 1883], pp. 184-91, 243-71).
26. Nibley, "The Idea of the Temple in History," pp. 232-36.
27. Ibid., p. 230.
28. Ibid.
29. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1938), p. 183.
30. Nibley, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*, p. 154.
31. *Millennial Star* 15 (July 1853):488-90.
32. Refer to note 25. Orson Pratt is extremely plain in his lectures on planetary movement and order. He gave an interesting discourse on "God Is Light" (*JD*, 19:280-94).
33. Percy L. Myer, *The Symbolic Stones on the Buttresses of the House of the Lord in Salt Lake City and Their Significance* (Caldwell, N.J.:

Percy L. Myer, 1945), pp. 5–9; D&C 20:1. Myer’s pioneering study was done without the assistance of the 1878 temple plan. He based his study on observations made directly from the temple and coordinated them with the associated Jewish and Gregorian calendars to arrive at his conclusions.

34. Ibid., p. 9.
35. Ibid., pp. 10–12.
36. “True Christmas and New Year’s Day” in Lundwall, *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt*, pp. 56–60.
37. Myer, pp. 18–22.
38. Revelations 14:6–7. Myer equates the heavenly messenger to the Jewish Feast of the Trumpets. He translates 1 Tisri to the date of the appearance of Moroni to Joseph Smith on 22 September 1827. To establish this point, he quotes Leviticus 23:23–24.
39. *Deseret News*, 15 April 1892; Angell, Sr., p. 274.
40. Ibid.
41. Refer to note 29.
42. John A. Widtsoe, *Priesthood and Church Government* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1939), pp. 258–59; D&C 107:22–23.
43. 1 Nephi 12:9–10. Orson Pratt spoke at length on the positions of the various quorums and their priesthood responsibilities (*JD*, 19:115–17).
44. Raynor, *The Everlasting Spires* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1965), p. 142.
45. Angell, Sr., pp. 274–75.
46. D&C 110:16.
47. Joel 2:1.
48. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1958), p. 704.
49. Psalms 33:18; Proverbs 15:3.
50. James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1968), p. 150; Revelations 1:8.
51. Ibid.
52. “The Prophet and Patriarch,” *The Improvement Era* 14 (July 1911):855.

53. Angell, Sr., p. 275.
54. 1 Corinthians 15:40–42; D&C 76:50–113.
55. Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Progress of Man* (Salt Lake City: The Genealogical Society of Utah, 1936), pp. 492–505; *JD*, 1:280–94.
56. It is interesting that the dome over the Christus statue in the old Visitors Center was painted to represent the universe. Astronomers from the Hansen Planetarium in Salt Lake City calculated the position of the planets and stars at the time of the organization of the Church—6 April 1830—and the heavens were portrayed thus in the mural surrounding the statue (*Church News*, section of *Deseret News*, 11 June 1966).