

Historian as Entrepreneur: A Personal Essay

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Wednesday, January 5, 1972. I was planning my lectures for the next day in my office at Utah State University, when the telephone rang. "Hello, Dr. Arrington? This is President Tanner. I would like to see you; when will you next be in Salt Lake City?" I replied that I would come whenever he wished. "How about yesterday?" he asked with a chuckle. We agreed on eleven the next morning.

In recent years I had had several conversations with President N. Eldon Tanner and had been impressed with his grasp of historical perspective and gratified by his encouragement of responsible scholarship. A Canadian, he had served many years as Minister of Lands and Mines in Alberta, and later as president of Trans-Canada Pipelines. He is a person of great personal charm who, as a counselor in the First Presidency, directs the business operations of the LDS Church. A call from him to a Mormon like me was like a call from the president of the United States to a potential cabinet appointee. Several months earlier A. William Lund had died after sixty years of service as assistant Church historian. As I drove that frosty morning the ninety miles to Salt Lake City, I decided President Tanner wanted to ask me the names and qualifications of persons who ought to be considered to replace Brother Lund.

Upon my arrival in the Church Office Building in Salt Lake City, I was immediately ushered into President Tanner's office and seated in the big leather easy chair next to his own. He was friendly, unhurried, and gracious. "Brother Arrington, I'll come straight to the point and not waste our time," he said.

You know that our assistant Church historian, Brother Lund, died last February and we have not replaced him. For the past two years, as you know, Elder Howard Hunter of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles has served as Church Historian. He has been a fine administrator, but, as you know, he is not really a historian. Elder Hunter is a lawyer by profession. We would now like to reorganize the Church Historian's Office

by establishing a formal Historical Department of the Church. We would like Brother Alvin Dyer [a former member of the Church First Presidency] as managing director; you, Brother Arrington, as Church Historian; and Brother Earl Olson [who has served many years as a librarian-archivist] as Church archivist. Will you accept the position of Church Historian?

Naturally, I accepted. It was a historian's dream. Since 1831 "Church Historian" had been an ecclesiastical office primarily concerned with the preservation of documents and artifacts. In more than 150 years only a handful of trusted Church leaders had had unrestricted access to the Church Archives—one of the most important depositories of Americana in the Mountain West. The new Church Historian was charged with assisting the librarian-archivist in making this preservation archive a working archive. For the first time he was to have a professionally trained staff of researchers and writers to produce articles, monographs, and books of a scholarly nature. Based on original source materials, many previously untouched, these publications were bound to have a significant impact on the understanding not only of Mormon history but also of Western American history.

That was five years ago. From that time, my career as historical administrator has been amply rewarded. Since 1972 staff members of our History Division have published fifteen books, sixty-two articles in professional journals or chapters in scholarly books, twenty-two reviews in professional journals, and seventy-one articles in Church publications. Five books and many more articles are scheduled for publication in 1977.

How did a farm boy from Idaho come to such a position? Certainly it was not from youthful inclinations, for of all subjects in high school and college, I disliked none more than history. Only by a circuitous—and fortuitous—route did I migrate from chicken farmer to agriculture major; from agriculture to economics; from regional economics to Western economic history; and finally from Western history to Mormon studies. In ecclesiastical affairs I evolved from branch president of a North Carolina congregation of Mormons (while working on my doctorate) to a member of the presidency of the Utah State University Stake—a student stake composed of married and single LDS students attending Utah State University.

Born 2 July 1917 in a one-room, frame house on a farm near Twin Falls, Idaho, I was the third of Noah and Edna Corn Arrington's eleven children. At Twin Falls High I participated in debate and Future Farmers of America, eventually serving as Idaho State President and National

First Vice-President of the latter organization. At home, I contributed to the family income by raising 2,000 baby chicks, caring for 400 Rhode Island Red laying hens, and helping with the farm.

Attending the University of Idaho was an exciting experience for me. I was active in politics and debate, worked as a reporter for the school newspaper, pitched “gold dust” on the university’s dairy farm, and earned the Phi Beta Kappa key when I graduated in general economics.

Actually, it was more my distaste for chemistry than my dislike for manure that induced me to switch from agriculture to economics. Perhaps my interest in economics was first piqued in 1932 when many farmers had given up harvesting their crops because of depressed prices. I was fifteen when my father was selling his No. 1 Idaho baking potatoes for ten cents per hundred pounds. That year, upon my father’s encouragement, I included slips of paper in some of the sacks of potatoes. “We are getting ten cents for these potatoes,” I wrote. “But we are paying \$1.50 to \$2.70 for them here,” came several replies from California. Obviously something was wrong; evidently, not all the manure was in the barnyard. I decided that when I went to college I would study agricultural economics. But the rigid requirement that every graduate of the College of Agriculture must have two full years of chemistry caused me to switch, after one year, to the College of Social Sciences, with a major in general economics.

Graduating from the University of Idaho in 1939, I was offered a Kenan Teaching Fellowship in economics at the University of North Carolina. I was delighted to accept because the university had a good reputation for sound scholarship, and because my ancestors, for many generations, had lived in the Tarheel State. Two years later, I began teaching at North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

It was in my upper class years at the University of Idaho and the two years at Chapel Hill that I read the writers who had the greatest influence on my life. They included novelists as well as economists, philosophers as well as ecclesiastics. I was much attracted to the southern agrarians and their regional and distributist approach to social problems. (Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Herbert Agar, Frank Owsley, and books like *I’ll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America?*, together with Douglas Jerrold, Christopher Dawson, G. K. Chesterton, and George Bernard Shaw in England.) I read most everything they had written, and found myself agreeing with much they said.

When World War II came along, I volunteered for an officer’s commission in the Navy but was rejected as being too short—I couldn’t quite reach 5’6” even after three weeks of exercises. The Air Force and Marines

rejected me for an asthmatic condition. So I obtained a leave of absence from North Carolina State to help in the civilian war effort, working for the North Carolina Office of Price Administration. After six months of setting prices for firewood, laundry service, and dairy products, I was finally drafted into the U.S. Army.

On my last weekend pass from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, I married Grace Fort of Raleigh. I had been courting her for some eighteen months, but she would not consent to marriage until I was about to be shipped overseas. I don't know what that tells about my attractiveness. Our platoon embarked for North Africa in July 1943.

For the first eighteen months we processed Italian prisoners of war in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. I was slated to make the invasion of Southern France until an order came at the last minute to send us to Italy instead. Through a fortunate circumstance, this private first class was inexplicably appointed Allied Controller of the Central Institute of Statistics in Rome, known as "Il Controlore Americano." It was something approaching a sub-cabinet post in the military government—certainly the best job any army PFC could ever hope for. With a personal staff of thirty, including a personal chauffeur, an usher, secretary, errand boy, and others, I had time to survey the Italian economic scene and attend more than fifty operas. I was stationed for eight months in Rome. Assigned to the Committee for Price Control in Milan, I participated in the invasion of northern Italy, arriving in time to see Benito Mussolini and Clara Petacci hanging by their heels in front of a Milanese gas station. Finally, after thirty-three months overseas, I was ready for an honorable discharge.

On 4 January 1946, I was reunited with my weekend bride. We had exchanged more than a thousand letters during my nearly three years absence. Somehow we felt closer than we might have done had we not been separated. We have had an enjoyable marriage and three children. James is a professional actor; Carl is a staff writer for the *Detroit Free Press*; Susan is a graduate of Utah State University and the wife of the conductor of the symphonic and marching bands there.

During my years in North Carolina, social scientists were rediscovering the South—surveying in depth the economy and culture, and accumulating a mass of statistics which eventually went into Howard Odum's monumental *Southern Regions*. An idea often repeated at that time was that all culture is local culture, all history local history; rather than begin with Greece and Rome, one ought to begin with one's own

neighborhood, state, and region. The more one understood the culture in which he lived, the closer he came to understanding humanity.

I was excited about the regional approach to economic analysis. My major professor, Milton S. Heath, encouraged me in these studies, and I felt a “burning in my bones” to participate in doing for the American West what Odum, Vance, Heath, and others had done for the American South. There was no systematic, scholarly appraisal of the Mountain West—nothing equivalent to what had been done and was being done for the South.

So in the summer of 1946, having accepted an offer to teach economics at Utah State University, I went to Salt Lake City to discuss dissertation topics with various people. Dr. John A. Widtsoe, former president of Utah State University and of the University of Utah, and an apostle of the LDS Church, suggested I concentrate on Mormon country, rather than all the western states. He pointed out that there was a common cultural heritage and economic background within this broad community, and there was much that could be done. Teaching at Logan, I would have relatively close access to documents in Salt Lake City, and he thought, if I were politic, I would be given access to the abundant materials in the LDS Archives.

Church Historian Joseph Fielding Smith was somehow persuaded to give the project his blessing, and I began researching my dissertation, “Mormon Economic Policies and Their Implementation on the Western Frontier, 1847–1900.” The summers were spent in the Historian’s Office reading and taking notes from the five or six hundred volume *Journal History* and other documents in the archives. I was allowed perfect freedom in using these materials. Elder Widtsoe was right. Perhaps no other part of the world its size is as completely documented as Utah. Letters, minutes, speeches, sermons, account books, diaries—everything necessary to recreate regional history from original source materials—were available to me.

The historic Mormon community was a complete society—diversified and well-balanced. As early as 1850, for example, eighty-five occupations were being practiced in the territory. Utah’s relatively well-rounded economy stood in sharp contrast with that of neighboring states and territories. Called upon to service overlanders, miners, and other Westerners in a number of ways, Mormon communities were essential to the progress of non-Mormon settlement and industry in much of the Mountain West.

I sought to locate other persons interested in Mormon studies, and was very much benefited when a group of three other USU faculty members and their wives—S. George and Maria Ellsworth, Eugene E. and Beth Campbell, and Wendell O. and Pearl Rich—agreed to meet once a month with Grace and me to read original papers by each of us on Mormon culture and history. Some of these papers were subsequently published. I was particularly benefited by attending seminars by George Ellsworth on the sources and literature of history. He was my mentor in historical method.

In 1951 I began publishing some of my findings. Beginning that year some of my articles on Mormon economic programs and activities found their way into *Rural Sociology*, *Journal of Economic History*, *Economic History Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Pacific Historical Review*, *Business History Review*, and other historical journals, books, and encyclopedias.

Upon the advice of my thesis director, my dissertation, completed in 1952, was submitted to the Committee on Research in Economic History, a standing committee of the Economic History Association funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. Following the suggestions of the appointed readers, Arthur H. Cole of Harvard and Lewis Atherton of the University of Missouri, I began to revise the dissertation for publication. In 1956 I received a sabbatical from USU and a six-month fellowship, later extended to a full year, at the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, in San Marino, California, where the 700-page manuscript of *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900* was completed. After eleven years of research and writing, without the aid of research assistants but with the critical comments and suggestions of George Ellsworth, I finished the book.

It was published in 1958 by Harvard University Press while I was in Italy lecturing to university students as a Fulbright Professor of American Economics. There, with the approval of Professor Edward C. Kirkland and his publishers, I rewrote and adapted his splendid book, *A History of American Economic Life*, to serve as a text for Italians interested in American economic history.

Returning to America in 1959, I found that some of those who had read *Great Basin Kingdom* wanted to know whether I was a Mormon. A number of Mormon students wrote to congratulate me that a non-Mormon had written such a fair book. At the same time some non-Mormon readers wrote to express surprise that a Mormon could produce such an objective work. It was my intention in that book to

write an impartial study of the Mormon economic system, and how Brigham Young and his associates and successors managed to preserve some of the more unique aspects of the Mormon economic way. In the preface, I presented the need for, and value of, an objective study of this religious economic system:

The true essence of God's revealed will, if such it be, cannot be apprehended without an understanding of the conditions surrounding the prophetic vision, and the symbolism and verbiage in which it is couched. Surely God does not reveal His will except to those prepared, by intellectual and social experience and by spiritual insight and imagination, to grasp and convey it. A naturalistic discussion of "the people and the times" and of the mind and experience of Latter-day prophets is therefore a perfectly valid aspect of religious history, and, indeed, makes more plausible the truths they attempted to convey. While the discussion of naturalistic causes of revelation does not preclude its claim to be revealed or inspired of God, in practice it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish what is objectively "revealed" from what is subjectively "contributed" by those receiving the revelation.¹

This still represents my point of view as to the necessity and possibility of "naturalistic" history of religion.

Great Basin Kingdom, however, was only a beginning. Much remained to be done. Established for religious purposes, dominated by religious sentiments, and long managed by religious leaders, Mormon country—Utah and parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Idaho, and Wyoming—is an important laboratory for the study of religion and its relationship to social development. Utah's history illustrates problems connected with settlement of isolated, mountainous, and semi-arid regions. Perhaps more importantly, it demonstrates the possibility and techniques of economic development without outside capital. But a perusal of twelve standard works on American history in 1959 revealed only two which mentioned the Mormons and Utah. Of the eight leading texts on American economic history, I found Mormons mentioned in only one, and that in connection with colonization. In Arnold Toynbee's monumental ten-volume history of civilization, Utah and the Mormons are mentioned three times, each time with one line—once in connection

1. Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. ix.

with plural marriage, once regarding the trek west from Nauvoo, and once concerning the Book of Mormon.

I felt that neglect of the Mormon heritage in the general American literature did not necessarily reflect a low opinion of their achievements; Theodore Roosevelt, Richard T. Ely, Thomas Nixon Carver, Ray Stannard Baker, William Smythe, and others had made repeated references to Mormon experiments, and eventually voluntary associations, corporations, and state and federal bureaus frankly adopted policies suggested by the Mormon experience. Moreover, that modern Westerner, Walter Prescott Webb, in planning for his television series of seventy lectures on the history of American civilization, planned for two lectures on the Mormons and invited me to present these, in 1963, at the University of Texas.

It seemed clear to me that the superficial treatment of Utah and Mormon history was due to the lack of good, scholarly monographs on which general history authors might base their work. This, in turn, could be attributed to the attitude held by many Utah Mormons that their history was family history, having no significance for anyone but themselves. Or, if they were devout Latter-day Saints, they found Utah history important only insofar as it contributed to an understanding of the history of their Church.

To help improve this situation I applied in 1959 for a grant from Utah State University to fund summer work on Utah and western economic history. Each summer for thirteen years, according to the terms of the grant, I was able to employ a senior or graduate student to collaborate in researching and writing articles and monographs. This began the broadening of my career. Henceforth I would be not only an individual scholar, but an “historical entrepreneur,” organizing large projects and team efforts, and often working in collaboration with graduate students and colleagues. We began with a study of Utah’s defense industry. The state had just become a leader in the missile industry, and with Jon G. Perry, I published an article on the development of “Utah’s Spectacular Missiles Industry.” Then came a series of ten articles in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* on Utah’s defense bases—eight in collaboration with Thomas Alexander, one with Archer L. Durham, and one with Tom Alexander and Eugene Erb. There were also articles and monographs on the economy of the Wasatch Front with George Jensen; the beginnings of commercial mining in Utah, Utah industries established by the Defense Plant Corporation during World War II with Anthony T. Cluff

and Tom Alexander; the Horn silver bonanza with Wayne Hinton; and studies of several major federal irrigation projects in Utah.

One of the most significant of these early group studies resulted in the publication in 1963 of *The Changing Economic Structure of the Mountain West, 1850–1950*. Under the USU grant I was able to employ two accounting majors and two other assistants for an entire summer to do a detailed analysis of the occupational census reports for each of the eight western states. These compilations were made in such a way as to compare occupational changes within each state or territory over time, and also to compare states and territories at any given stage of development. Comparisons were also made between the Mountain States as a group and the United States as a whole. This analysis antedated the use of the computer, and foreshadowed the kind of studies which the computer has made possible in recent years. The study has been incorporated in the Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in History and demonstrates the contributions which an economist can make to the study of western history.

While finishing a history of the Utah and Idaho Sugar Company, *Beet Sugar in the West*, I became more involved in projects relating to the intellectual, social, and institutional history of Mormonism, as well as its economic aspects. I became acquainted with scholars at other universities and in a variety of disciplines who were interested in western, Utah, and Mormon studies. We exchanged study group speakers and papers. At historical conventions we made it a point to look up others with similar interests. Then, at the September 1965 meeting of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, a dozen of us agreed to prepare for a formal organization of the Mormon History Association. I was designated temporary chairman, a committee was appointed to prepare a constitution and to nominate a slate of officers. At the December meeting of the American Historical Association in San Francisco approximately fifty persons attended the organizing meeting of the MHA. I was elected president, with Eugene Campbell of Brigham Young University and James L. Clayton of the University of Utah, vice-presidents; Dello G. Dayton of Weber State College was secretary-treasurer, and the following were members of the Council: Robert B. Flanders, Graceland College; Davis Bitton of the University of California at Santa Barbara; Alfred Bush of Princeton; and Merle Wells of the Idaho State Historical Society. (This list included a non-Mormon and a member of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints as well as Latter-day Saints.) The stated purpose of the organization was the promotion of

understanding, scholarship, and publication in the field of Mormon history.

For the first few years the Mormon History Association met in conjunction with the annual American Historical Association convention, and then with the Western History Association. By 1970 membership had increased to around 200 and a separate annual convention was initiated each April in Utah or at a historical Mormon location. The association now has a membership of 750, including nearly all professional LDS historians, many seminary and institute of religion teachers, Reorganized LDS historians, and a few persons from other faiths and fields.

We had intended in 1965 to commence publication of a journal entitled *Latter-day Saint History*, but in discussing such a publication we discovered that Eugene England, Wesley Johnson, Joseph Jeppson, and others at Stanford were about to found a new independent journal under the name *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. They agreed to give special attention to historical articles, and we agreed to submit manuscripts and support their publication. I became an advisory editor for *Dialogue* and organized and edited a special Mormon history issue, "Reappraisals in Mormon History," in 1966.

At that time, I was a visiting professor of history at UCLA, teaching classes in Western American history. Alfred A. Knopf contacted me there, suggesting I write a history of Utah and the Mormons for his company—a history which would, he said, "fill the biggest single gap in western history." To my knowledge this was the first time a national publisher had asked an active Mormon to write a major work on the history of his people. I regarded it as a significant opportunity to demonstrate that Mormon scholars could write responsibly and professionally about their heritage, and provide an antidote for the works of openly hostile or at least unsympathetic writers.

Such a history could not, however, be written from published accounts alone. Knowing of their desire to improve the Mormon Church's image in the nation's history books, I wrote the First Presidency of the Church requesting access to Church correspondence, diaries, minutes, and other documents heretofore restricted. They soon replied with permission for unrestricted use of materials in the Church Historian's Library and Archives. This was the first time such authorization had been given a professional historian, and paved the way for subsequent developments in the use of Church Archives. Because of my appointment as Church Historian, the Knopf book was delayed, but with the collaboration of Davis Bitton, it is now nearing completion.

When I returned to Utah State in the fall of 1967, George Ellsworth suggested we approach Gaurth Hansen, the new academic vice-president of USU, with the idea that USU sponsor a new *Western Historical Quarterly* under the auspices of the Western History Association. I was then vice-president of the association, and since previous efforts to convert other publications (*Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, *Arizona and the West*, *Pacific Historical Review*)—into a journal suitable for general WHA circulation had failed, we drew up a proposal, which was accepted, for USU to pay for overhead and editorial work, and the association and its members to pay for printing and distribution.

The following year I was elected president of the association and editor of the quarterly, with George Ellsworth as associate editor. Dr. Ellsworth played a leading role in basic policy decisions, format, and copy. We received some fifty manuscripts and published about sixteen the first year.

In 1971 the American Historical Association formed a committee consisting of the editors of leading historical journals in the nation to study potential cooperative activities. Representing the *Western Historical Quarterly*, I was pleased to discover the esteem this publication had acquired among editors of the *American Historical Review*, *Journal of American History*, *William and Mary Quarterly*, and *Southern Historical Review*.

In the meantime, with the continued support of the Utah State University Research Council, I still directed research on western, Utah, and Mormon history and benefited from collaboration with others. A brilliant graduate assistant of mine at UCLA, Jon Haupt, persuaded me to make an intensive study of fictional works relating to Mormons, and generously shared his own expertise in literary criticism by collaborating with me on several articles in this genre. We have other articles in our heads if we can only find time to develop them. Working with Truman Madsen of Brigham Young University, I helped develop plans for an annual Mormon history issue of *BYU Studies*. The first such issue, appearing in 1969, contained articles treating the early Joseph Smith period of Mormon history. Special issues have appeared annually on the Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois periods.

Meanwhile, under the USU grant I directed the preparation of three books: "A History of the First Security Corporation, 1928–1973," which the corporation has chosen not to publish; a biography of David Eccles, published in 1975 by Utah State University Press under the title *David Eccles: Pioneer Western Industrialist*; and a biography of a Mormon apostle published in 1974 by Brigham Young University Press under the title *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman*.

While I am listed as the author of each of these publications, they really represent the research and writing skills of a large number of undergraduates, graduate students, and colleagues who contributed their time and expertise in return for compensation out of project grant funds. It would not be possible to mention all of their names here, but they are credited in the prefaces of these publications. These books represent an attempt to demonstrate that bright students can get good experience and training in research and writing by working under a historian director—and they can produce a creditable product. The two books which were published have received generally favorable reviews. My most recent books are *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons*, with the collaboration of Feramorz Y. Fox, now deceased, and Dean L. May; and *From Quaker to Latter-day Saint: Bishop Edwin D. Woolley*.

At the time of my call to be Church Historian, President Tanner informed me that he had talked with President Dallin Oaks of Brigham Young University, and that, if I agreed, I was to serve also as Lemuel Hardison Redd Professor of Western History and the inaugural director of the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at that university. Both positions were made possible by a generous grant from Charles Redd, who made funds available for research and publication in Western American history, lecturers' fees, research fellowships, travel, and the purchase of rare books and manuscripts. It was decided that I should divide my time between BYU and the Historical Department of the Church, with Tom Alexander assisting as associate director of the Redd Center. I asked James B. Allen of Brigham Young University and Davis Bitton of the University of Utah to serve as the two assistant Church historians. Both divide their time between their respective universities and the Church Historical Department.

The Historical Department as it now stands includes four divisions: the Church Library, consisting of published works about Mormon history; the Church Archives, comprising the unpublished works—letters, diaries, minute books, financial ledgers, photographs, films, and phonograph records and tapes; the Church Curator's Division, with charge of the Church's historic sites and collection of art and artifacts; and the Church History Division, under my direction, in which there are fourteen full-time historians and six secretaries and typists. Our mission is to do in-depth research and compile and write books and articles for Church publication and for professional journals. Eight of our fourteen historians have the Ph.D., while others are working toward that goal.

All of us are under the general direction of Elder Joseph Anderson, formerly Secretary to the First Presidency of the Church and now a member of the First Quorum of Seventy.

Our History Division staff in the Historical Department is both professionally trained and personally complementary. James Allen is a talented writer and loyal associate. With an extensive background in American history and a Ph.D. from the University of Southern California, Dr. Allen has had experience in the Church's institute system and at BYU. He is probably the best-informed student of twentieth-century Mormon history among Mormon scholars. Davis Bitton, after receiving the Ph.D. from Princeton, taught Renaissance and Reformation history at the University of Texas and at UCSB before coming to the University of Utah. In the preparation of a monumental bibliography (soon to be published) he has read or supervised the reading of every known Mormon diary of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and he has a marvelous capability for critiquing historical manuscripts. Our editor, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the University of Utah, served as managing editor of the *Western Humanities Review* and taught at the University of Utah before joining our staff. She is a warm, attractive personality, as well as a skillful literary critic.

The program of research and writing which attracted these professional historians and editors to the new Church Historical Department was initiated by the longtime Church Historian, Joseph Fielding Smith. Elder Smith, serving from 1910 to 1970, had been primarily concerned with the preservation of historical documents and artifacts. He sent Earl Olson, Church archivist, to professional seminars throughout America, where he became acquainted with modern classification and security systems in anticipation of the day when the archives would be more accessible to the general public. After 1967, Brother Olson secured clearance from the First Presidency for several historians in addition to myself to have unrestricted access to the archives for scholarly work. It was when Elder Smith became President of the Church in 1970 that Howard W. Hunter, a Church apostle, was appointed Church Historian. Under his direction the archives were prepared to become a working archive as well as a preservation depository. This was finally realized with the organization of the Historical Department in 1972.

With our own appointments in 1972, we members of the History Division sensed we were on the brink of a new era of Mormon and Western American historiography. And our expectations are being fulfilled. Within the first year of operations we:

1. Inaugurated a sixteen-volume sesquicentennial history of the Latter-day Saints, signing contracts with sixteen Mormon scholars and authors located at various universities throughout the nation.
2. Began a Mormon Heritage series of important edited documents, beginning with Brigham Young's letters to his sons.²
3. Discovered and catalogued more than fifty boxes of previously unknown materials containing especially valuable Brigham Young documents.
4. Assisted archivists with the preparation of registers and guides to archive collections.
5. Produced articles for several magazines and professional journals.

In the years since 1973, we have worked on biographies, community and area histories, demographic studies, monographs on special topics, and various in-house historical background reports. We have also conducted an ongoing Oral History Program and have taped more than 2,000 hours with some 800 persons thus far. Our program of work is developed by James B. Allen, Davis Bitton, and myself, in consultation with our professional staff and ecclesiastical supervisors (who have been unflinchingly supportive of our efforts). We have also assisted others to do research in our archives by granting a number of \$1,000 fellowships each year. We have also assigned certain book projects to professors at Brigham Young University and elsewhere and have thus involved the entire community of Mormon historians in a systematic program of exploring and publishing materials on Mormon history.

Our stewardship as historical entrepreneurs requires many decisions that scholars working alone seldom face. We must decide how to allocate our research staff time and research monies. Should we be preparing research aids and reference works for other scholars, or should we be supplementing the works of other scholars by writing interpretive essays and monographic treatments? Should we approach the task of research by restricting our efforts to the materials in our own archives, basically those previously unused; or should we work on topics that need treating and supplement our own materials with those at other libraries and archives? Should we produce books and articles primarily

2. Dean C. Jessee, *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974).

for our professional colleagues and a national audience, or primarily for members of our own faith?

There are many related questions which require decisions. Assuming we think a good biography of Brigham Young is needed, should we do a highly detailed biography, which might require as many as six volumes? Or restrict ourselves to a conventional one-volume biography? Should it be directed primarily at our fellow Church members, or should it be a definitive “scholarly” biography submitted for national publication?

There is one problem which may be more characteristic of a Church research center such as ours than of many other historical archives. Under what circumstances are we justified in making confidential materials available to professional historians? There are lodged in our archives many hundreds of letters which were written on a confidential basis to the President of the Church or to other high Church officials. Some of these contain confessions of murder, adultery, fornication, burglary, or other crimes. Are we violating the deceased’s right to privacy by making such material available to scholars? Other documents contain minutes of Church trials, where details of wrongdoing are spelled out. Still other minutes tell of disputes between Church officials and record statements made in the heat of passion which the officials must later have regretted.

Some scholars are anxious to get their hands on such documents and emphasize the public’s right to know. Others would like to take the information in them into consideration, but feel no necessity to make public the names of the perpetrators. Still others prefer not to know or make known what was in confidential sources. Whether such material should be made available to outside scholars is one question; whether my colleagues and I should see them is another. And if we should, inadvertently or not, see such materials, to what extent are we justified in using them? These questions face us and our ecclesiastical advisers every day.

That no satisfactory “final” answer is apt to be forthcoming is suggested by the lack of agreement as to whether or not Robert Woodward and Carl Bernstein were ethically responsible in their second book on Watergate, *The Final Days*. Other archives housing such records as the files of social workers and marital counselors face a similar dilemma. It requires the wisdom of a Solomon to determine the delicate balance between the individual’s right to privacy and the public’s right to know. Personally I have no wish to be in the position of suppressing useful and relevant information. On the other hand, it would not be proper for me—nor would I wish—to expose the Church, its leaders, and its members to

unfair or sensational disclosures about their personal lives. It is inevitable that in my present position I should occasionally feel like the Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Not only are the administrative problems weighty; the ethical problems require soul-searching. Fortunately, I am able to counsel with understanding brethren.

Happily, the richness of our archives and the complex, exciting events of Mormon history assure that there are many topics of undeniable importance which are unaffected by such ethical complexities. These occupy most of our research attention. Even in areas where the source material does raise questions of privacy, I am optimistic that we are discovering ways of getting at what we need to see and of using our findings in a responsible way, often by means of a quantitative approach that will provide a good sense of what was going on while avoiding the sensationalism of individual exposure that is typical of some of the more slick popular magazines.

It is almost imperative that Arrington, Allen, Bitton, and Beecher read every article and book manuscript prepared by our own staff, and often the manuscripts of others who request our review. Handling administrative chores during office hours, I usually spend two or three hours each evening, and most of the weekends, reading manuscripts. I spend one day a week at Brigham Young University on projects associated with the Redd Center for Western Studies. Weekly speaking engagements occupy additional time. Consequently, there is not as much time available for independent research and writing as I should like—nor for football games or dinner parties, or for summer vacations. The long conversations I used to enjoy with colleagues and with our children are now replaced by frequent dictated letters.

Nevertheless, I would not change places with any historian in America; nor, as a Mormon, would I change places with any Church official with a different assignment. I am blessed to have what I regard as the most challenging assignment in the field of history, and the most pleasant and exciting assignment in my Church, and I am proud to add that all my work in the documents of the Church has increased my love for it and my faith in its divine mission.

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