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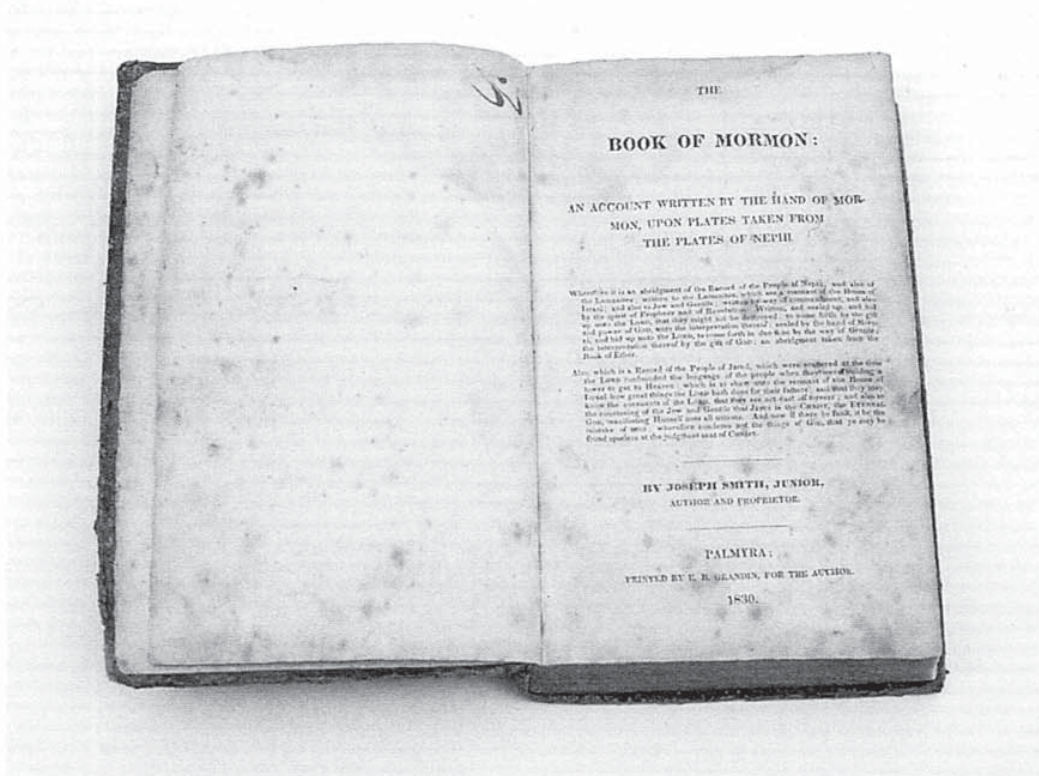
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Abstract: In his landmark conference addresses in 1986, President Benson repeatedly cited the Doctrine and Covenants and reiterated his long-standing belief that the Church was under condemnation for taking the Book of Mormon too lightly. He also announced that "the Lord has revealed the need to reemphasize the Book of Mormon." Latter-day Saints responded with an enormous and passionate effort to fully utilize the Nephite record. Such fervor did not always exist.

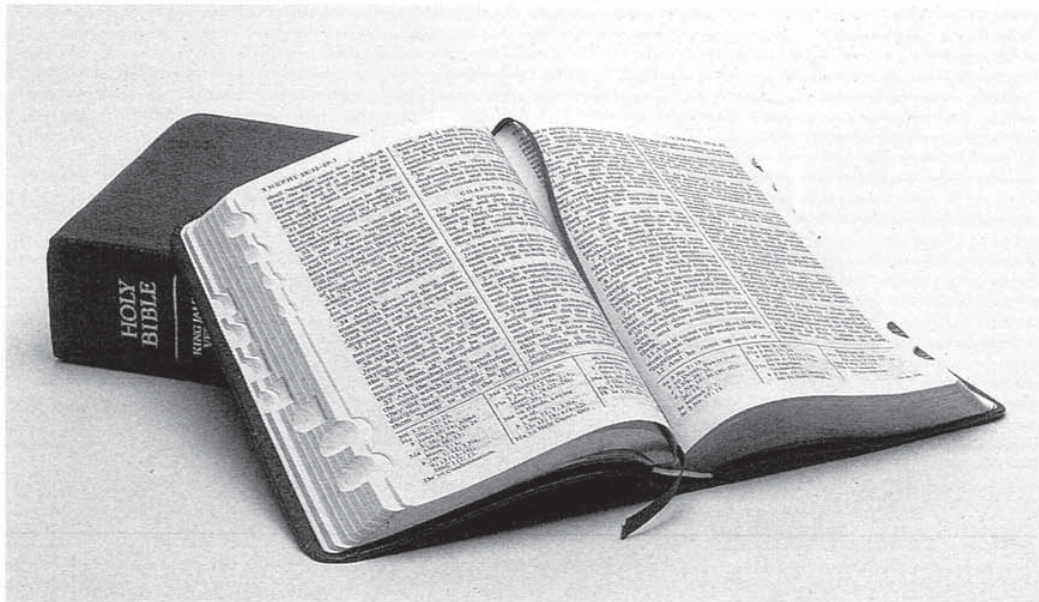


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Courtesy Museum of Church History and Art



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1830 and 1981 editions of the Book of Mormon. *Top:* Book of Mormon, 1830 edition. Presented to Emer Harris by his brother Martin Harris, spring 1830. *Bottom:* The 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, and the 1979 Latter-day Saint edition of the Holy Bible.

The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon in the Twentieth Century

Noel B. Reynolds

The Book of Mormon was underutilized by most Latter-day Saints until interest in it surged during the second half of the twentieth century.

And your minds in times past have been darkened because of unbelief, and because you have treated lightly the things you have received—Which vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation. And this condemnation resteth upon the children of Zion, even all. And they shall remain under this condemnation until they repent and remember the new covenant, even the Book of Mormon. (D&C 84:54–57)

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Book of Mormon clearly holds center stage in Latter-day Saint scriptural study and appreciation. Congregations, the Church Educational System, individuals, and families are focusing on the Book of Mormon with unprecedented enthusiasm, largely because of the leadership of President Ezra Taft Benson. In his landmark conference addresses in 1986, President Benson repeatedly cited the passage from the Doctrine and Covenants quoted above and reiterated his long-standing belief that the Church was under condemnation for taking the Book of Mormon too lightly. He also announced that “the Lord has revealed the need to reemphasize the Book of Mormon.”¹ Latter-day Saints responded with an enormous and passionate effort to fully utilize the Nephite record.

Such fervor did not always exist. Early LDS converts were students of the Bible, and with no traditions concerning the Book of Mormon, they did not readily incorporate the new scripture into their devotions.² The early Saints valued the Book of Mormon as evidence of the Restoration, but by the Nauvoo period, focus on the book had already decreased.³ As recently as the mid-1930s, BYU and the LDS Institutes of Religion only occasionally featured the Book of Mormon in their curricula.

This paper surveys the history of LDS interest in the Book of Mormon. While it only scratches the surface of the total information that might be discoverable, I hope it will provide a sound first step toward understanding the phenomenal increase in appreciation and study that has occurred in the last three to four decades in mainstream LDS circles. At the same time, interspersed throughout this paper are a few observations about certain

manifestations of “cultural Mormonism”⁴ and its discomfiture over the Book of Mormon.

Early Neglect and Expressions of Concern

Although the Book of Mormon was used by early missionaries as a conversion tool, writings in the early years of the Church contain remarkably few references to the Book of Mormon. An analysis conducted by historian Grant Underwood indicates that early LDS literature cited the Book of Mormon infrequently compared with Bible references.⁵ From 1832–38, in publications such as the *Evening and the Morning Star* and the *Messenger and Advocate*, the ratio of Bible references to Book of Mormon references averaged nineteen to one. In some publications, such as the *Elders’ Journal*, the ratio was as high as forty to one.⁶ Why the disparity? Because, explains Underwood, many early Mormon converts were steeped in the study of the Bible but had no “opportunity for formal instruction or catechization in the Book of Mormon.”⁷ Although the existence and truthfulness of the Book of Mormon was a crucial point of faith and touchstone of conversion for the early Saints, it would take time and effort for the contents of that distinctive volume to come into widespread use. Underwood found that in the early years the Saints used the Book of Mormon predominantly to supplement Bible prophecies about the last days. W. W. Phelps also links early “neglect” of the Book of Mormon to the Saints’ penchant for “hunting mysteries in the prophecies.”⁸

A 1940 study by Alton D. Merrill analyzed the content of speeches and writings on the Book of Mormon from the earliest (1830–55) and latest (1915–40) twenty-five-year periods of the Church’s history.⁹ While Merrill’s statistical approach seems primitive by modern standards, it did reach conclusions that roughly corroborate Underwood’s. Both of these studies found that a very low percentage of early LDS speeches and writings overtly encouraged the study or distribution of the book. Any small gains that may have been made in Book of Mormon usage during the late pioneer period in Utah were probably set aside during the early years of the twentieth century, when the Church was working politically, socially, and educationally to become more a part of American life than it had been in its earlier period of geographical isolation from and political conflict with mainstream American culture.

Though the Book of Mormon was largely overlooked throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a few leaders emphasized the importance of this newly revealed scripture. In 1834, William E. McLellin, then a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, used the Book of Mormon extensively and voiced his displeasure should any Church sermon fail to draw on this book.¹⁰ In 1881, John Nicholson, recently returned from his second British mission, asked a general conference audience: “Why, my brethren

and sisters, are we not more familiar with the contents of this book?” He went on to assert that “no Latter-day Saint can intelligently comprehend the signs of the times unless he is informed in regard to the teachings of this record.” He then referred indirectly to Doctrine and Covenants section 84:

In the early rise of this Church the Lord manifested his displeasure with the Saints because they did not pay sufficient attention to the revelations contained in the Book of Mormon, and that book itself promises [that] . . . when the people are sufficiently advanced to receive them, other records of momentous importance shall be brought forth for the consideration of the Saints; but I do not think we will receive anything additional to what we have already obtained in this form until we have manifested a suitable appreciation of that which has already been given to us.¹¹

German E. Ellsworth came to a similar conviction during his long service as president of the Northern States Mission. He recounted in a 1919 general conference address that he “received an impression of the Lord” that the Saints must remember the Book of Mormon to escape the condemnation spoken of in the Doctrine and Covenants. “It came to me as strong as if someone . . . had told it to me,” he said. Later, “while standing on the Hill Cumorah,” he heard these words: “Push the distribution of the record that was taken from this hill, for it will help bring the world to Christ.” He immediately sent picture postcards of the Hill Cumorah to all his missionaries.¹² Interestingly, these three early, emphatic statements each emerged in a missionary setting.

Earlier, in an April 1908 general conference talk, President Ellsworth had become probably the first person to directly invoke Doctrine and Covenants 84:54–57 in urging people to remember the Book of Mormon. Following this lead, other Church leaders have similarly invoked this scriptural warning.¹³ In 1949, Marion G. Romney used it to encourage daily Book of Mormon reading and, in 1960 and 1980, he used it to show how the evils of the world can be overcome by studying the Book of Mormon.¹⁴ Elder Benson used Doctrine and Covenants 84:54–57 as early as 1975 and, as President of the Church, used this scripture at least a dozen times between 1984 and 1988.¹⁵

However, the Church as a whole did not respond in a dramatic way to any of these urgent messages until after President Benson’s emphatic messages in 1986. As the following data shows, that response can be quantified by measuring the references to the Book of Mormon in general conference, the use of the Book of Mormon in Church missionary efforts, and the volume of publications about the Book of Mormon.

General Conference References to the Book of Mormon

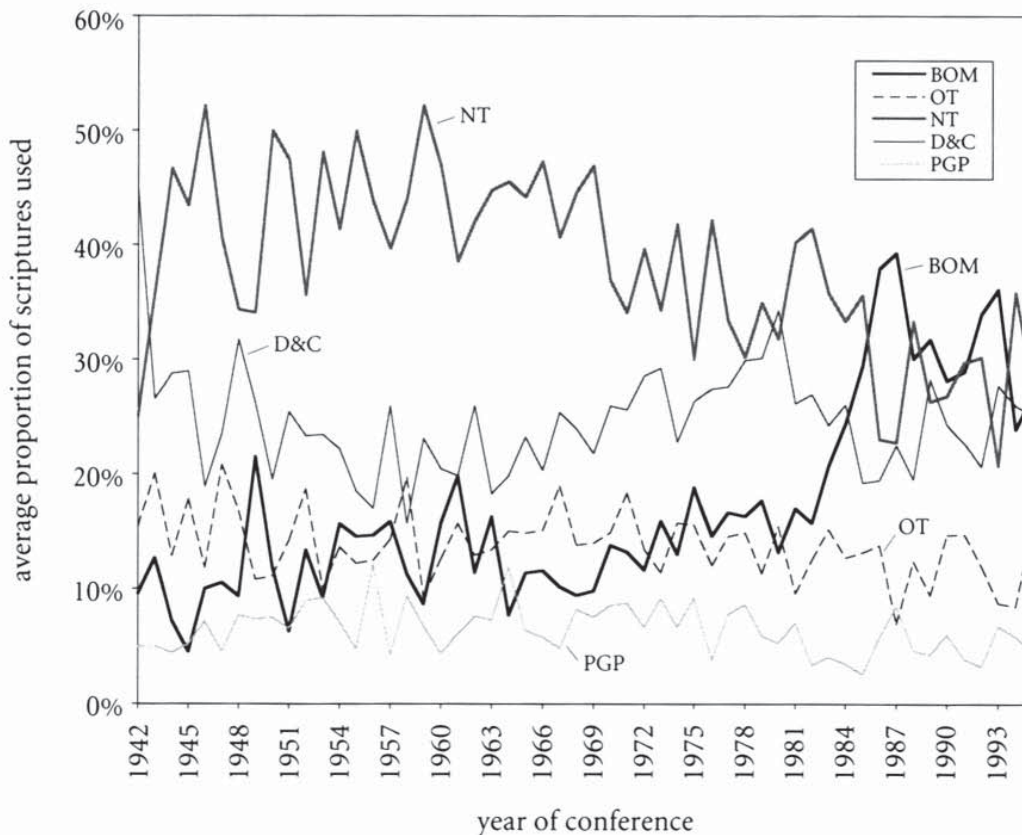
One way to measure increased use of the Book of Mormon is to count and analyze the number of times the book is cited or discussed in general

conference. The frequency of such citations reflects the extent to which Book of Mormon passages have entered the common discourse of Latter-day Saints, as well as indicating the current emphasis placed on the Book of Mormon by Church authorities.

Citation Analysis of General Conference Addresses (1942–1993).

Richard C. Galbraith's exhaustive study of scriptural references in general conference shows Book of Mormon citations hovering around 12 percent of total scripture citations until President Benson's 1986 challenge to the Church (see chart 1).¹⁶ Book of Mormon citations jumped to 40 percent over the next year, then leveled off at about the 25 percent mark—almost twice the earlier rate. When the Book of Mormon rate rose, the percentage of citations of the New Testament and the Doctrine and Covenants dropped, with the New Testament rate showing the sharpest decline. It appears that conference speakers found Book of Mormon texts to support teachings they had traditionally supported with New Testament or Doctrine and Covenants references.

CHART 1. Scripture Usage at General Conference



SOURCE: Data based on Richard C. Galbraith, *Data on General Conference Reports, 1942–1995*, unpublished manuscript, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

Depth Analysis of General Conference Addresses (1950–1994). A further study of general conference talks classifies references to the Book of Mormon according to the significance or intensity of the reference.¹⁷ In this examination, my assistants and I measured four levels of intensity: (1) a brief reference (mere mention); (2) a brief discussion of one to two paragraphs (minimal); (3) one of several major components of the talk (secondary); and (4) the main topic of the talk (primary). Our results suggest that minimal references (level 2) have been consistently higher and have increased over the years far more than substantial ones (secondary and primary levels of intensity). However, substantial references (levels 3 and 4) increased and reached their peak during 1985–89, most likely influenced by President Benson’s 1986 address.

This kind of data must be used cautiously. Some of the individuals who have made the most substantial statements on the Book of Mormon are not necessarily the same ones who have cited the Book of Mormon most. The data does not prove anything about individual speakers and may not prove much about the group as a whole. The following Church leaders have made important contributions to our understanding and appreciation of the Book of Mormon but have very low citation rates in the Galbraith index: Gordon B. Hinckley (.11—meaning that only 11 percent of his scripture citations were from the Book of Mormon), LeGrand Richards (.10), Spencer W. Kimball (.16), Bruce R. McConkie (.15), Joseph Fielding Smith (.14), and Levi Edgar Young (.05). Some of the most vocal Book of Mormon promoters also tended to cite other scriptures at higher rates. Milton R. Hunter had rates of .29 for the Doctrine and Covenants, .26 for the New Testament, and .22 for the Book of Mormon. Marion G. Romney had rates of .40 for the Doctrine and Covenants and .22 each for the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. John A. Widtsoe wrote an important book on Book of Mormon evidences¹⁸ yet never cited the Book of Mormon in conference talks after 1942. Nevertheless, the overall statistic may well reflect a general trend.

Missionary Work and the Book of Mormon

Missionary instructional materials offer a unique view of the Church’s perception of itself and presentation of its core beliefs to those outside the faith. The Church did not publish a missionary handbook until 1936, leaving mission presidents to develop their own approaches to proselytizing. Some emphasized the Book of Mormon but many did not.

Two general approaches appear to have dominated. The first was developed by Ben E. Rich, president of both the Southern States and Eastern States Missions. His method promoted a Mormon slant on standard religious questions while only briefly mentioning the Book of Mormon. The Bible was the primary resource against standard Protestant views.¹⁹

The second approach was taken by German E. Ellsworth, president of the North Central States Mission through much of the early 1900s. As already reported, Ellsworth was a great Book of Mormon advocate and used the book endlessly as a primary tool in missionary work. To satisfy the need for large numbers of books, Ellsworth enlisted other mission presidents and founded Zion's Press in Independence, Missouri, to print the Book of Mormon and missionary tracts in large quantities.²⁰ Ellsworth's influence remained strong in the Northern States Mission under President John Taylor. One missionary, who served from 1927 to 1929, notes that her mission leaders instructed missionaries "to tell the news of the Restoration of the Gospel and place Books of Mormon in homes." Accordingly she "gave or sold hundreds of Books of Mormon."²¹

This emphasis may have been specific to certain missions. The decades of the twenties and thirties show little evidence of Churchwide emphasis on the Book of Mormon in missionary work. Missionary plans and tracts written by mission presidents B. H. Roberts (Eastern States Mission), John A. Widtsoe (European Mission), and LeGrand Richards (Southern States Mission) always included discussion of the Book of Mormon but did not feature it. Elder Roberts assigned a missionary companionship to operate a traveling street display about the Book of Mormon, and Elder Widtsoe encouraged placement of the Book of Mormon via tracting. The official Church handbook for missionaries used from 1937 to 1946 did little to promote the Book of Mormon.²²

In the 1940s, some missions renewed an emphasis on use of the Book of Mormon in proselytizing.²³ Glenn Pearson and Reid Bankhead, who served together in the North Central States Mission in the early 40s, developed new approaches to using the Book of Mormon in missionary work.²⁴ Bankhead passed many of these ideas on to Richard L. Anderson while the two were serving in the military in the mid-40s.²⁵ Later, Anderson wrote a "Plan for Effective Missionary Work," which was first published by the Northwestern States Mission in 1949. Instead of beginning with the apostasy as most approaches had, the Anderson Plan focused primarily on the Book of Mormon. This plan was used widely.²⁶

Other missions began creating their own plans modeled to some degree after Anderson's, but with varying approaches toward the Book of Mormon.²⁷ Truman Madsen reports that in the late 1940s, New England Mission President S. Dilworth Young used "Push the Book of Mormon" as the mission motto.²⁸ The more common experience is probably represented by Robert J. Matthews's observation that the Book of Mormon was not widely used in the mission field: "It isn't such a matter of opposition as it was just neglect. . . . We didn't know we were neglecting it. . . . We were trying to impress the world, we'd go to them with the Bible. . . . We thought that's how it had to be."²⁹

The first Churchwide approach to missionary work was published in 1952.³⁰ It established seven discussions, compared with twelve in the Anderson plan and even more in previous plans.³¹ The 1952 plan used some elements of the Anderson plan³² but generally followed a plan from the Great Lakes Mission, introducing the Book of Mormon only after lessons on the Godhead, the Apostasy, and the Restoration, in effect placing “less emphasis” on the Book of Mormon.³³ Individual missions adapted and added to the Churchwide plan to serve their particular views and needs, and some, such as the British and New England Missions, introduced the Book of Mormon earlier in the discussions and used it more centrally. The first major revision of the plan, issued in 1961, moved the Book of Mormon up to the second discussion.³⁴ Meanwhile, in the mid-1960s, Cumorah Mission President Reid Bankhead developed a plan centered completely on the Book of Mormon. The method met with considerable success, raising the average rate from one baptism per missionary to four per missionary.³⁵

The Book of Mormon’s use in missionary work continued to grow. Truman Madsen reports that when he was called as a mission president in the mid-60s, Elder Hinckley, then on the missionary committee, counseled him to read the Book of Mormon.³⁶ Hugh Nibley describes being present with the Presiding Brethren in the Salt Lake Temple in the late 1960s when it was revealed during prayer that the Book of Mormon had not been emphasized adequately as a missionary tool.³⁷

The missionary plan was revised again in 1973, and the Book of Mormon was moved into the first discussion, where it remains today. Missionaries also often use the Book of Mormon in door approaches and street contacting.³⁸ As Church education has stressed the Book of Mormon more, missionaries are going into the field with a more solid understanding and testimony of the book, leading to greater incorporation of it into every facet of missionary work.³⁹

Outside of full-time missionary work, a member-initiated project developed. In the early 1970s, Temple Square volunteers William Bradshaw and Eugene England Sr. began writing their personal testimonies of the Book of Mormon inside copies of the book that they gave away. The “family-to-family” distribution project soon spread to a Primary class and a few families, then became a grass roots movement. Individuals or families would paste their own photographs and personal testimonies inside the covers of any quantity of copies of the Book of Mormon, then send the books to a receptive mission for free distribution by missionaries. The program was implemented Churchwide in 1975 when Spencer W. Kimball became President of the Church. It received another significant boost in October 1988 when President Ezra Taft Benson encouraged the Church to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon.⁴⁰ By the end of the 1980s, printing of the Book of Mormon had soared to meet increasing demand. The extraordinary

success and popularity of the program provide clear evidence of a solid and enthusiastic base of support for the Book of Mormon among Latter-day Saints in recent decades. It is hard to imagine something like this project having succeeded in the 1930s or 1940s.

Book of Mormon Translations

There have been four major periods of significant translation effort: the 1850s, the 1900s, the 1930s, and the period from 1960 onward, with a particular effort during the 1980s (see table 1). The 1850s translations included major European languages—French, Italian, German, and Welsh. The turn-of-the-century translations—into Samoan, Tahitian, Turkish, and Japanese—reflect missionary expansion in the South Seas, Middle East, and Far East. The translations completed in the 1930s included Czech, Armenian, Braille, and Portuguese.

Beginning in the 1970s, the Church has emphasized translating selections instead of complete texts. This enables the Church to provide at least some support to missionaries working with less common languages and signals the Church's view of the centrality of the Book of Mormon in missionary work.⁴¹ By 1990 the complete Book of Mormon was available in 36 languages, with portions offered in 44 others.⁴² Plans call for 100 languages early in the next millennium.

Books and Articles Published about the Book of Mormon

Examining the number of publications of books and articles that discuss, criticize, or study the Book of Mormon is a viable way to measure general interest in the book. While it is impossible to establish that number definitively, looking at the increase in holdings of the main BYU library and at an exhaustive bibliographic study undertaken by FARMS can give a good picture.

Brigham Young University Library Holdings. Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library purchases all books dealing with Mormonism, making the library's catalog a strong indicator of the rate of publication on Book of Mormon topics. This rate rose 50 percent in the late 1970s and another 230 percent in the early 1980s. The rate of increase slowed to about 30 percent in the 1990s (to date). These increases are a clear indication of major expansion of the demand for new titles on this topic.

FARMS Book of Mormon Bibliography. The comprehensive bibliography of the Book of Mormon released by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies in 1996⁴³ gives a deeper look at publication on the Book of Mormon. While the Lee Library catalog only lists book-length publications, the FARMS bibliography includes separate listings for

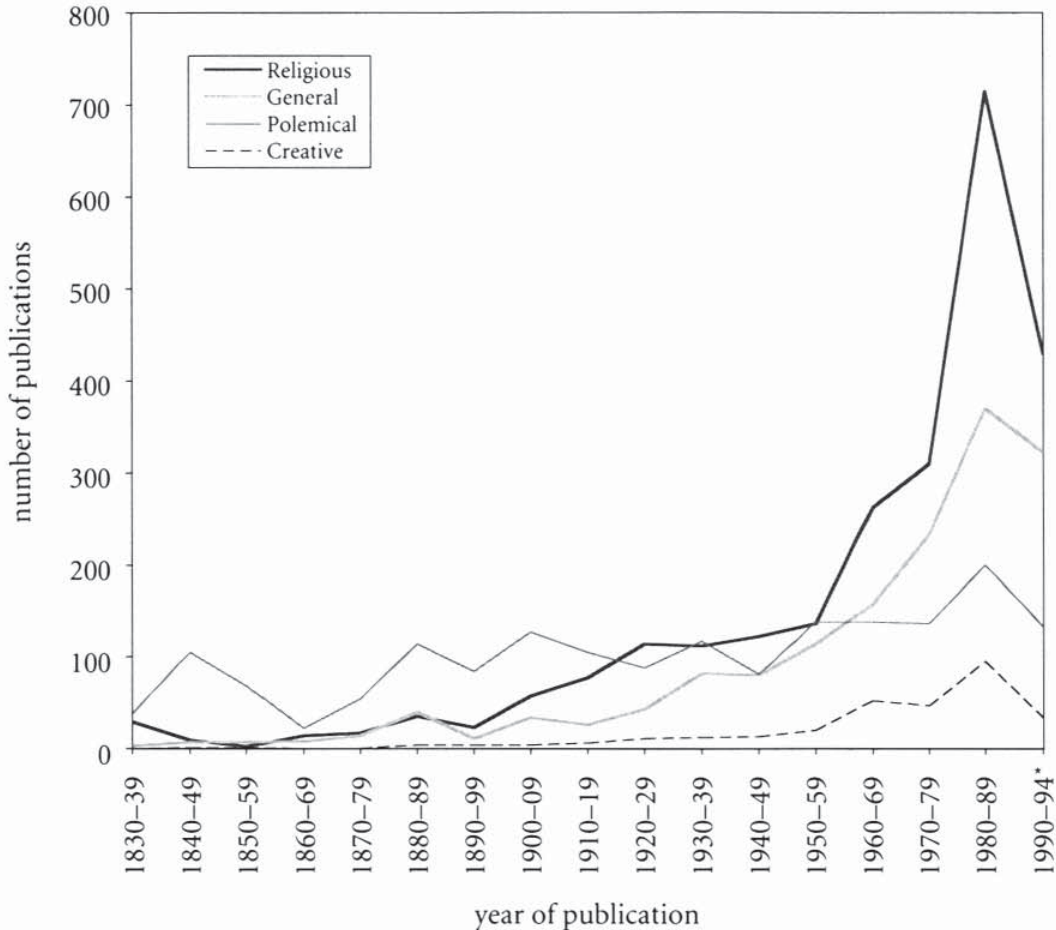
TABLE 1. New Translations of the Book of Mormon
(full, selections, and major revisions)

Year	Number	Year	Number
1830–40	0	1950	1
1841	1	1951–53	0
1842–50	0	1954	1
1851	1	1955–64	0
1852	4	1965	2
1853–54	0	1966	0
1855	1	1967	1
1856–68	0	1968–71	0
1869	1	1972	1
1870–74	0	1973–75	0
1875	1	1976	1
1876–77	0	1977	2
1878	1	1978	1
1879–85	0	1979	6
1886	1	1980	7
1887–88	0	1981	8
1889	1	1982	8
1890	1	1983	13
1891–1902	0	1984	1
1903	1	1985	2
1904	1	1986	3
1905	0	1987	7
1906	1	1988	5
1907–8	0	1989	2
1909	1	1990	0
1910–32	0	1991	2
1933	1	1992	1
1934–36	0	1993	0
1937	1	1994	1
1938	0	1995	2
1939	2	1996	1
1940–45	0	1997	1
1946	1	1998	2
1947–49	0		

all articles, pamphlets, and separately authored chapters in books. For this article, each of the FARMS entries was sorted first as to whether its approach was general, religious, polemical, or creative (see chart 2). The first three categories were further analyzed as to whether each entry was scholarly (see chart 3). The polemical materials were also sorted according to whether they argued for or against the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

The most obvious result of this analysis is the rapid rise in all types of publications, especially since 1970. This dramatic market growth may

CHART 2. Publications about the Book of Mormon by Category



SOURCE: Data based on *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1996).

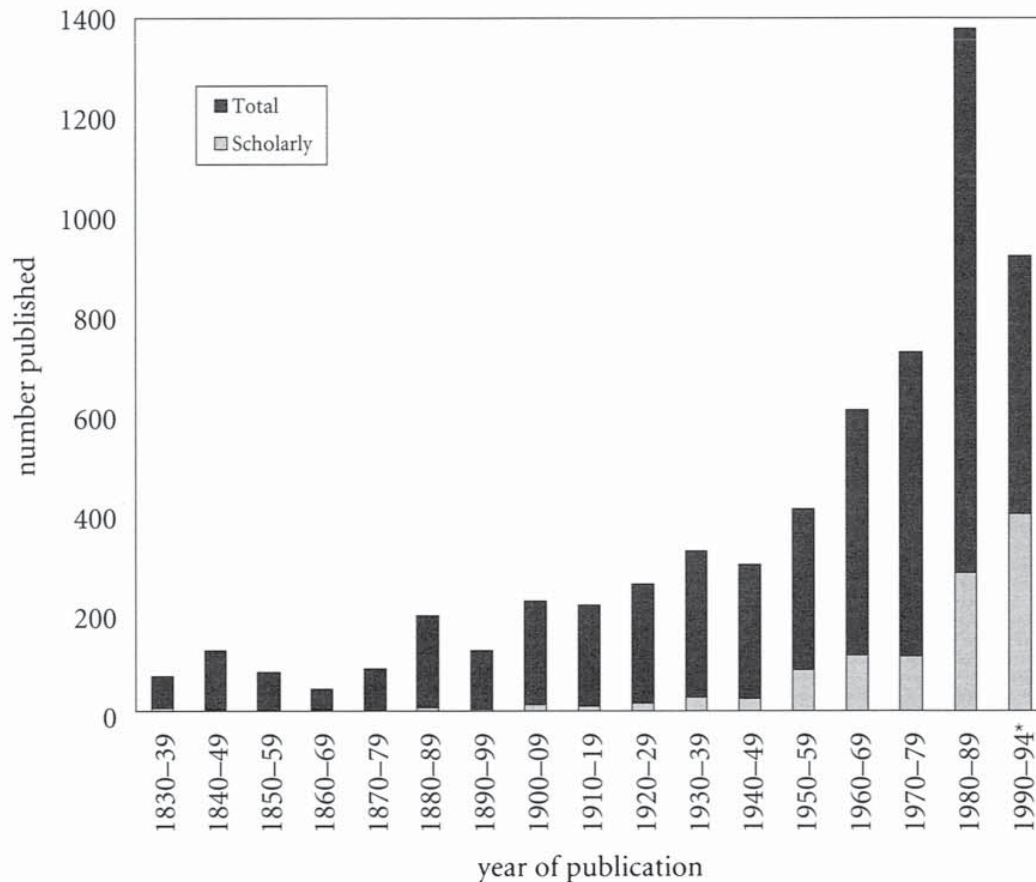
*Please note that this measurement reflects only a five-year period.

constitute the strongest indicator of a significant increase in serious interest in the Book of Mormon. (The increases after 1970 should not obscure the fact that significant increases were already occurring after 1940.) The increases in publications listed in the FARMS bibliography are much greater than those measured in the Lee Library catalog.

Most of the increase in publication was in general and religious categories, reflecting more interest in the Book of Mormon itself than in arguments about historicity. The number of publications that defend the Book of Mormon was two to three times greater than the number of publications that opposed it.

Scholarly publications increased at the same rate as nonscholarly publications. The interests of scholars and the general public seem to be linked

CHART 3. Scholarly Publications Relative to Total General, Religious, and Polemical Publications about the Book of Mormon



SOURCE: Data based on *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1996).

*Please note that this measurement reflects only a five-year period.

to the same motivations and fluctuate in tandem. Also, new scholarly publications may inspire a proliferation of nonscholarly projects dealing with the same topics and materials.

For most of the nineteenth century, answering critics was the dominant focus of publications by writers who believed in the divinity of the Book of Mormon. Since the early 1890s, however, the general and religious categories have steadily gained ground. In the mid-1970s, defensive apologetic writing dropped below 10 percent of all publications and has stayed in that range. Faithful exegetical approaches to the Book of Mormon appear to be increasing steadily.

Several spikes in apologetic writings of a scholarly character can be readily associated with single scholars or particular groups of scholars. The

surge around the turn of the century is due to numerous articles and books published by George Reynolds and B. H. Roberts. The bump in the 1930s is mostly explained by Sidney Sperry's publications. And the much larger peak in the 1950s reflects the parallel, but independent, writings of Hugh Nibley, Francis W. Kirkham, and a group of anthropologists and archaeologists at BYU, including John Sorenson, Wells Jakeman, and Ross Christensen.

The most dramatic and voluminous increase in apologetic writings by LDS scholars began in the early 1970s, and the critics reacted at the end of that decade with a similarly sharp increase in publications, some of which were better documented and more articulate than their previous publications. Until then, critical writings rarely met even minimal scholarly standards of evidence and logic but were more likely to be unthinking and inflammatory, relying principally on the Spaulding theory or other long disproved arguments against the antiquity of the Book of Mormon.⁴⁴ Once again, this data echoes the evidence of the previous sections witnessing to the dramatic increase in the quantifiable usage of the Book of Mormon in the late twentieth century.

The Book of Mormon in Sunday School

There is no direct way to measure Book of Mormon usage in Church instruction during the twentieth century, so I have analyzed indirect indicators and interviewed a dozen people knowledgeable about significant developments in this regard. One of the most tangible collections of data is the library of Church manuals and course descriptions. These sources also show a decisive increase in Book of Mormon usage in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

The Book of Mormon has always played some role in Sunday School instruction, but it was not a major element until the 1970s.⁴⁵ Over one hundred years ago, the Sunday School organization began distributing a series of resources for teachers. Of the thirty-one leaflets in this series, which were used in 1889 and 1890 to teach the life of Christ, only one featured the Book of Mormon. The thirty-one leaflets were available again in 1896, and twenty-five new leaflets were added, five of which featured the Book of Mormon. By 1898 the number of these leaflets had grown to 136, including ten on the Book of Mormon.⁴⁶ In 1903 preteens received one year of Book of Mormon biographical stories, and midteenagers took a two-year course on the book.⁴⁷ Adult courses were not a widespread part of Sunday School until after 1905.⁴⁸

In general, from the late 1920s to the 1960s, adult Sunday School manuals tended to reflect developments in the larger culture of American Christianity, especially the advent of modernism and the social gospel. Beginning in 1933, the course entitled "Gospel Messages" focused on philosophical issues surrounding Church history, science and religion, applied religion,

social ethics, and comparative religions.⁴⁹ The New Testament came to play an increasingly significant role in Sunday School materials, as these ethical and social gospel approaches almost exclusively used that book of scripture.⁵⁰

Accordingly, in the 1930s—and presumably earlier—the Book of Mormon text as such was not a main focus of study. Instead, the book was discussed in terms of its stories or its inception. Another definite, though less frequent, theme was the examination of evidence for the veracity of the Book of Mormon, reflecting the interests of B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, and others.⁵¹

Comprehensive Book of Mormon approaches gradually began to emerge by the 1920s and 1930s. In 1924 the Book of Mormon was a full-year topic for the midteens. From 1928 to 1932, lessons for this age group rotated through the scriptures, with three years spent on three Book of Mormon topics, one year each on teachings, history, and evidences for the book's divinity.⁵² In 1934 a single Book of Mormon course for teens dealt with the chronological history and teachings of the book, and in 1935 the year was devoted to "treasure hunting" for evidence of the book's divinity.⁵³ Finally, in 1938 and 1939, a two-year gospel doctrine course for adults focused on the Book of Mormon, but the book dropped back out of the adult curriculum until 1948.⁵⁴

One of the most important developments in the twentieth-century Sunday School curriculum was its accommodation to the correlation program. Under correlation, the old semi-autonomous Deseret Sunday School Union was restructured in April 1971. The next major step was the organization in October 1979 of a new Sunday School presidency composed of General Authorities and a board.⁵⁵ The drift toward ethical and social gospel approaches was stopped, and a clear directive was issued to use the four standard works as the Sunday School texts, increasing the amount of attention given to the Book of Mormon.⁵⁶

A second crucial instructional development in the twentieth century was the 1972 innovation of an eight-year cycle that would take all adults through the standard works, using them as the course of study for Gospel Doctrine classes. Two-year blocks in the eight-year cycle were devoted in turn to the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Book of Mormon, and Church history and the Doctrine and Covenants. In 1982 the eight-year cycle was condensed to four years.⁵⁷ According to BYU religion professor Richard Cowan, this change was made because "[Church] leaders didn't want the Saints to go [six] years between the time they studied the Book of Mormon. . . . It was specifically concern about the Book of Mormon that dictated that change."⁵⁸

The Book of Mormon in Courses at BYU and throughout the CES

The Church Educational System's curriculum development has been more visibly systematic and more complicated than the development of

Sunday School manuals. The CES program thus provides a helpful and interesting window on the social, intellectual, and spiritual dynamics that shaped all Church curricula in the twentieth century. Plentiful documents allow these developments to be traced in considerable detail. Study of BYU religion courses and the CES curriculum shows the same general trend as the Sunday School, though with more pronounced extremes.

Given the overwhelmingly supportive attitude that Book of Mormon instruction enjoys at BYU today, both in Religious Education and among the faculty generally, it may be hard to understand or appreciate the intellectual milieu of cultural Mormonism that prevailed in scholarly Mormon circles during the first half of this century. Our interviews with people who were students or faculty members during those years reveal a depth of skepticism and antipathy toward the Book of Mormon, even among the very individuals responsible for teaching it, that one rarely encounters among Latter-day Saints in the 1990s. The holder of such views today would likely be characterized as apostate or dissident.

Historically, Brigham Young University has always been under an obligation to teach the standard works, including the Book of Mormon. The 1875 Deed of Trust for Brigham Young Academy (which included elementary and secondary students) explicitly listed all four standard works and stipulated that they “shall be read and their doctrines inculcated in the Academy.”⁵⁹ But the early academy fulfilled this obligation with scripture classes only for the younger students, while the college students were offered philosophical and theological courses, according to Robert J. Matthews, former dean of Religious Education at BYU.⁶⁰ Richard Cowan concurs: “We started [in the early 1900s] with the nonspecialist people teaching general ethics and that kind of thing.” In the 1930s, new faculty with training from Protestant divinity schools began adding “the kinds of courses that they would have taken back there,” said Cowan. “Only later did the latter-day scriptures come into their own.”⁶¹

Parting Ways with Secularism. The role of the Book of Mormon in the BYU curriculum has repeatedly surfaced as a major issue. In a particularly formative confrontation around 1910, two sets of brothers, Ralph and William Chamberlin and Henry and Joseph Peterson, professors of biology, philosophy, education, and psychology, respectively, were major intellectual powerhouses at BYU. They invested great personal energy inside and outside the institution to promote their views, which discounted the historical reality of any scripture.⁶² They promoted the humanistic thesis that a scientific mind could not accept the scriptures as literally true, and appealed to standard Protestant rationalizations for giving up on the miraculous and shifting religious focus to ethics and social concerns. Further, they argued that scientific and philosophical perspectives were optimal for intelligent Mormons.⁶³

But BYU did not operate in a vacuum any more then than now. The more popular these views became, the more complaints came in from concerned parents and townspeople. Horace H. Cummings, superintendent of Church education, reacted vigorously. He visited the campus for nine days at the end of 1910 and submitted a report to the General Church Board of Education on January 21, 1911.⁶⁴ Cummings reported that in the two years or so since the problematic teachings had been introduced at the Provo campus, mainly by five faculty, most of the students and much of the faculty had been won over. Students were zealous in defending the new views, reported Cummings. Their inspiration came directly from higher criticism of the Bible as articulated in the writings of Lyman Abbot, who regarded the Bible as a collection of myths and folklore. Christ's temptation was regarded as allegory; John the Revelator was not literally translated. Sin was redefined as ignorance. All truth was seen as changing. Visions and revelations were mentally induced; the literal reality of Joseph Smith's visions was questioned. The application of the theory of evolution required new characterizations of the fall and Christ's atonement and was "damaging to the faith of the students," wrote Cummings.⁶⁵ Proponents argued that rather than downgrading the scriptures, this enlightened understanding made the "Scriptures and the gospel . . . more dear and more beautiful to them, on that account, being broader in their applications."⁶⁶ These avant garde professors also enjoyed the clear support of many LDS intellectuals, including Milton Bennion, professor of education at the University of Utah who later became the Church's Commissioner of Education.⁶⁷

Cummings reported that the five faculty members most vigorously promoting these views had been asked to diminish their secularist zeal.

These teachers have been warned by the Presidency of the school and by myself, and even pleaded with, for the sake of the school, not to press their views with so much vigor. Even if they were right, conditions are not suitable; but their zeal overcomes all counsel and they seem even more determined, if not defiant, in pushing their beliefs upon the students.⁶⁸

Superintendent Cummings eventually won over reluctant BYU President George H. Brimhall. Cummings recorded in his autobiography a dream of Brimhall's, which was pivotal in gaining Brimhall's enthusiastic support of Church leaders' desire to focus the university's academic mission more clearly along the lines of doctrinal orthodoxy. In this dream, several BYU professors were casting bait into the sky where "a flock of snow-white birds" were flying contentedly above. When a bird went for the bait, it was immediately brought down to earth.

On reaching the ground the bird proved to be a B.Y.U. student, clad in an ancient Greek costume, and was directed to join a group of other students who had been brought down in a similar manner. Bro. Brimhall walked over to them, and noticing that all of them looked very sad, discouraged and downcast, he asked them:

“Why, students, what on earth makes you so sad and down-hearted?”

“Alas, we can never fly again!” they replied with a sigh and a sad shake of the head.

Their Greek philosophy had tied them to the earth. They could believe only what they could demonstrate in the laboratory. Their prayers could go no higher than the ceiling. They could see no heaven—no hereafter.⁶⁹

The effect of this dream on Brimhall can be seen in Brimhall’s ensuing letter to Church leaders:

I have been hoping for a year or two past that harmony could be secured by waiting, but the delays have been [fraught] with increased danger. . . . The school cannot go off and leave the church in any line of activity without *perishing in the desert*. . . . I recognize now that a more vigorous course of action on my part might have been better, but I was lenient, and patiently hopeful that men would change gradually as they have in other cases, but the storm, instead of dying out, increased in its fury. I feel now that nothing short of a public retraction should be accepted as a guarantee that these men will preserve an attitude of being in harmony with the spirit of the school and the doctrines of the church as preached by the living oracles.⁷⁰

As a result of Brimhall’s letter, the Board of Trustees resolved that teachers employed by Church schools must be in accord with Church doctrine.⁷¹ The Petersons and Ralph Chamberlin were dismissed for refusing to adjust to the directions, and several leading professors left as a result.⁷²

President Brimhall himself was characterized by his granddaughter Fawn M. Brodie as “nominally devout.” This may not have been a fair inference of Brodie, the open heretic, and her “quiet heretic” mother, who in younger years had regarded her father’s bringing of prominent secular social scientists and philosophers to the BYU campus as evidence of an openness that somehow diminished his faith.⁷³ But it does reveal the mentality of those years in which listening to secular scholars and studying their works was taken as some kind of implicit commitment to the secular point of view. Several examples of eminent and faithful LDS scholars from the second half of the century have thoroughly undermined that naive linkage.

Parting Company with Liberal Theology. More widespread acceptance of evolutionary thinking tended to eliminate evolution as an issue at BYU. But divisions between liberal and conservative approaches to the interpretation of scripture and doctrine, and disagreement over the religion curriculum set the ground for another significant battle over the influence of outside theology on instruction at BYU and in LDS Institutes of Religion.

In 1922, BYU President Franklin S. Harris established the Alpine Summer School at Aspen Grove, featuring a six-week school for CES teachers. While in retrospect Church educators today might see this as a formula for disaster, especially given the decidedly liberal orientation of much of the personnel involved, the school enjoyed the enthusiastic support of Commissioner Adam S. Bennion and even Elder Widtsoe, who taught some of the

courses. Joseph Merrill, Bennion's successor, was very impressed with the school, especially with Sidney Sperry's 1929 course on the Old Testament. Sperry was completing graduate work at the University of Chicago Divinity School, and Merrill decided to invite four University of Chicago divinity professors to teach at the summer school in successive years.⁷⁴

At the invitation of Merrill, a number of LDS graduate students were sent off to Chicago, with the offer of financial assistance from the Church and employment with CES, contingent upon their "faith and continued loyalty to the Church."⁷⁵ Throughout the 1930s, Merrill's successors, John A. Widtsoe and Franklin West, oversaw waves of students going to the University of Chicago and returning to teach at BYU and in the CES.⁷⁶ Nibley explains that in these decades the Church was "always very impressed by outsiders," hoping perhaps to change, through interaction with intelligent and liberally educated Mormons, the negative perceptions of Mormonism held by many of these outsiders.⁷⁷ Instead of realizing these benefits, however, the Chicago experiment resulted in many students returning as merely cultural Mormons.

The Chicago connection fell apart as Merrill and Widtsoe were called on missions and possibly changed their views on the value of the experiment. Widtsoe later cited this experiment as his basis for opposing a Ph.D. program in religion at BYU.⁷⁸ A strong reaction developed against the skeptical perspective of the Chicago brigades, culminating in the 1938 statement of J. Reuben Clark of the First Presidency to the religion teachers at the CES summer school. President Clark made clear to all concerned that the Church was committed to its historical origins in revelations, visions, and the inspired translation of the literally true Book of Mormon:

The Book of Mormon is just what it professes to be. . . . These facts . . . must stand unchanged, unmodified, without dilution, excuse, apology, or avoidance; they may not be explained away. . . . Any individual who does not accept the fulness of these doctrines . . . is not a Latter-day Saint. . . . Our Church schools cannot be staffed by unconverted, untestimonied teachers.⁷⁹

Such statements were received gratefully by believing students and teachers, according to Chauncey Riddle.⁸⁰ Unbelieving CES personnel such as Sterling McMurrin saw Clark's statement as a watershed event where the Church "placed severe limitations on academic freedom in matters relating to religion and morals throughout the Church Educational System."⁸¹

Turning to the Scriptures. From 1930 to the present, the Book of Mormon's role gradually increased at BYU, despite strong opposition. Of twenty-eight religion courses in 1930–31, only one lower division course dealt with the Book of Mormon, and it was more of an appreciation course than a course using the book as a text. The first fully developed Book of Mormon class was offered in 1937 by Amos Merrill.⁸² Introduction of this course faced considerable resistance from some department administrators,

remembers Hugh Nibley, and key faculty members wondered how the Book of Mormon could be taught for a whole quarter.⁸³

Other First Presidency mandates came down in 1940 and 1942. J. Reuben Clark sent a letter in 1940 to Frank West, saying that false doctrines were continuing to be taught in CES. The letter directs that religion teachers must teach only from the standard works, which

are the ultimate authority on all matters of doctrine. . . .

Teachers will do well to give up indoctrinating themselves in the sectarianism of the modern “Divinity School Theology.” If they do not, they will probably bring themselves to a frame of mind where they will be no longer useful in our system. . . .

The teachers will not teach ethics or philosophy, ancient or modern, pagan or so-called Christian; they will as already stated teach the Gospel and that only, and the Gospel as revealed in these last days. . . .

The *Gospel* should be spoken of as *the Gospel*, God’s revealed truth; it is not and must never be spoken of or treated as a “history and evolution of *human* ideas.” . . . Cumulative evidence coming to us leaves us with no alternative but to believe that some teachers (too many of them) are doubt sowers.⁸⁴

A 1942 statement, “Principles Controlling Church-Paid Service,” reiterated these same guidelines.⁸⁵

Lessening of Cultural Mormonism. At BYU many faculty left or went underground with their no-longer-appreciated views. Brigham Madsen left BYU in 1954.⁸⁶ One of the better-known Chicago graduates, Russel Swensen, explained how he and other like-minded BYU faculty dealt with the changing atmosphere without leaving the university: “[Clark’s] method . . . caused a lot of bitter reaction. . . . When I taught in the school, I found that I [had to be] discreet. Something that I thought might be a problem to people who didn’t have the background, I discreetly omitted. I think many [adopted] that—a voluntary censorship.”⁸⁷

Some CES personnel chose to leave the system rather than fight over the guidelines. Sterling M. McMurrin was one of the more visible of these Institute teachers, though he was less combative than many in the group. He simply found that CES was no longer the comfortable and nurturing environment he had once valued. He had never believed in the Book of Mormon—or even in God, for that matter—and would not agree to teach it, even if required to do so.⁸⁸ As he told one group at BYU, he had never even read the Book of Mormon.⁸⁹ This admission may seem surprising coming from a learned man who rejected the authenticity of the Book of Mormon on the grounds that he “know[s] of no real evidence in its support, and [that] there is a great deal of evidence against it.”⁹⁰ But like other leading spokesmen for this perspective widespread among these cultural Mormons, McMurrin had decided early on that because such a book couldn’t be true, it wasn’t worth reading. In the same interview, McMurrin

explained: "I came to the conclusion at a very early age, earlier than I can remember, that you don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it is just that simple. . . . all of the hassling over the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is just a waste of time."⁹¹

Sidney B. Sperry, on the other hand, is an example of how a believer can be fully educated in a secular scholarly tradition and yet remain comfortable in the faith. Sperry was the first Latter-day Saint to receive a Ph.D. in biblical languages and the first academically trained full-time religion teacher at BYU.⁹² Over the thirty-nine years Sperry taught at BYU, he inspired a number of students in Book of Mormon studies and was influential in bringing to BYU several religion professors who were thoroughly committed to the Book of Mormon.⁹³ David H. Yarn relates how skeptics sometimes assumed Sperry was not a believer. "I remember being in Dr. Sperry's office when one who was considered a religious skeptic came in to visit with him; upon learning that Dr. Sperry was writing about the Book of Mormon, the visitor said cynically, 'Oh, Sid, you don't believe that stuff about the Book of Mormon, do you?' Dr. Sperry, in a courteous and respectful manner, but in firm and unmistakable terms, bore a resolute testimony concerning the Book of Mormon."⁹⁴

Chauncey C. Riddle remembers, "When I was a student [in the 1940s], the Book of Mormon was scoffed at, sneered at, by a great many of my professors on campus."⁹⁵ David Yarn, also a student in the 1940s, reports that "in a lot of wards it was hardly realized that we had a Book of Mormon. . . . I think the general membership was woefully ignorant on the Book of Mormon. They were much skilled in the Bible. Even in missionary work, it was generally the Bible that was used."⁹⁶ Hugh Nibley observed, "Not long ago you would find stake presidents who had never read the Book of Mormon."⁹⁷

Robert Matthews reports finding similar sentiments in a different context: "I remember when I came home from my mission, that would have been in 1948 . . . talking to an LDS audience in my hometown [Evanston, Wyoming], just a small group. And I remember I said to them, 'The Book of Mormon is the most important book in the whole world.' And I remember some of them saying, 'More important than the Bible?' And they struggled with the concept that the Book of Mormon should be that important."⁹⁸

Hugh Nibley recalls that when he first arrived at BYU, he maintained an active connection with the so-called "swearing Mormons," or "swearing elders," a circle of LDS liberal academics at BYU and elsewhere who regularly met from 1949 to 1950 to freely discuss intellectual issues relating to Mormonism. Many of the "swearing elders" questioned fundamental beliefs of the LDS faith, and some flatly rejected the Book of Mormon as

a divine work. Nibley tells of being invited to Salt Lake City to talk with this group about the Book of Mormon:

And they'd say, "Well, now you're among friends; now you can say what you really feel about the Book of Mormon and about anything else." Well, then I bore my testimony, and oh, were they mad. They were just boiling. I never saw such anger. They just ripped me. And then, . . . O. C. Tanner laid it out about the Book of Mormon, "We have to get rid of it, it's driving the best minds out of the Church. You can't see it, but with my training, I can know it." He'd say to me, "Now Joseph Smith was a deceiver, but he was a sly deceiver. The Book of Mormon is not true." . . . they had a real active hatred of the Book of Mormon up there even though they were members of the Church.⁹⁹

There was never a straightforward housecleaning or change of direction in CES or BYU as a result of the controversy during the 1940s, but leadership responsibility was shifted increasingly to administrators who were orthodox in their beliefs and cautious about secularized approaches.

Teaching the Book of Mormon at BYU. The first significant increase in the number of Book of Mormon class sections at BYU occurred in the 1948–49 academic year, when Sidney B. Sperry, a strong supporter of Book of Mormon studies, became director of the Division of Religion, a post he held until 1954. Courses in Book of Mormon archaeology proliferated in the 1950s after Wells Jakeman and Ross Christensen joined the archaeology faculty.

At this same time, in the early 1950s, Church leaders became concerned about some CES teachers out in the field who were more interested in liberating their students from traditional LDS teaching than in instilling faith. Young CES administrators A. Theodore Tuttle and Boyd K. Packer were given a special assignment to seminaries and institutes "for some reinforcement, some shaping up," according to Brother Packer.¹⁰⁰ They frequently found themselves "challenged by a spirit of intellectualism that had spread under former administrators who had promoted men of such leanings over more orthodox religion teachers."¹⁰¹ During these years, Brothers Tuttle and Packer were mentored by Harold B. Lee, with whom they shared significant spiritual experiences that shaped their later careers as General Authorities.¹⁰² A 1954 five-week summer seminar for all seminary and institute personnel chaired by Brother Packer featured daily instruction by Elder Lee, with supporting appearances from President J. Reuben Clark Jr., President Joseph Fielding Smith, and half the members of the Quorum of the Twelve.¹⁰³

At BYU, the next big jump occurred in 1961, when the Book of Mormon became the required religion course for all freshmen.¹⁰⁴ Under the influence and efforts of Professor Daniel H. Ludlow and others, the curriculum in religious education was further focused to give greater attention to uniquely LDS scriptures and history. Finding enough teachers to cover all of these new sections was a challenge, which Ludlow met in part by



Courtesy BYU Religious Education

Joseph Smith Memorial Building, Brigham Young University, April 19, 1990. From 1941 to 1991, this building housed Religious Education and many BYU religion classes. Sharpe Photography.

developing a film version of the Book of Mormon that was shown to several large sections in the Joseph Smith Building auditorium.

This development in the BYU religion curriculum did not emerge overnight but followed a prolonged debate in the Division of Religion over whether to change the required freshman religion course from a general course on LDS theology to a course on the Book of Mormon. It was generally agreed that the initial course was critical because of high university dropout rates after the first year. Many students who left for marriage or missions did not return to BYU. Eldin Ricks, Reid Bankhead, and Glenn Pearson led the faction in favor of the change.¹⁰⁵ Many arguments were advanced in support of that position, in particular the value of immersing students directly in the text of the Book of Mormon. Pearson emphasized his view that the Book of Mormon text provided a built-in control on teachers who might have liberal theological inclinations.¹⁰⁶ The debate raged back and forth among the religion faculty, and the university finally agreed to pass the question along to the board of trustees.

David Yarn, then dean of the Division of Religion, supported continuation of general LDS theology in the freshman course rather than the Book

of Mormon. Nevertheless, he continued to pray regularly for guidance on this issue that had proved so divisive for his faculty. He reports that while praying one evening in the spring of 1961, he was answered by an audible voice contradicting his own position and telling him that the Book of Mormon should be the required first-year course. Later that week, BYU President Ernest L. Wilkinson called to inform him that the board of trustees had finally decided the Book of Mormon should replace theology as the required course. Brother Yarn was grateful the Lord allowed him to know his will in advance, especially in view of the extraordinary rancor and backdoor politicking that had occurred during the extended decision-making process.¹⁰⁷

In the Church Educational System today, all Church college and institute students follow a course of study grounded directly in the scriptures. Since 1961, Church college curriculum has required a full-year Book of Mormon course at the beginning of college enrollment.

Teaching the Book of Mormon in Institute. The Institute of Religion curriculum developed parallel to that of the BYU religion department. In 1935–36 the Church's five institutes and the LDS Business College offered no Book of Mormon classes. By 1943 a rudimentary core curriculum included twelve basic courses to be offered each semester. Only one dealt with the Book of Mormon. Beyond these core courses, each individual institute offered its own electives, which often focused on philosophy, theology, comparative religion, ethics, and specialized LDS or biblical topics.

In 1963 a core curriculum was officially established to more closely control course offerings at institutes and BYU. Institutes no longer were permitted to teach courses of their own creation. Approved courses were based exclusively on LDS and biblical themes. Despite this effort to mandate the curriculum, a 1969 survey of the institute system revealed that, though only fifty-three courses were officially sanctioned, more than seventy were being offered. On average only 56 percent of students were enrolled in the recommended core classes. Of those, 34 percent were taking scripture courses, but only 15 percent were enrolled in Book of Mormon classes. In 1970 the Church dropped twenty-two nonscriptural institute courses in order to increase scripture study, particularly Book of Mormon study.¹⁰⁸

As the Church developed its institute curriculum, a significant concern was whether its courses would qualify for college credit at state colleges and universities. State colleges readily gave credit for institute courses without distinctively LDS content, such as Bible or Christian history classes, which put pressure on institutes to provide such courses. Accordingly, students were less likely to enroll in distinctively LDS courses that gave no credit. Thus generic religion courses proliferated and LDS-specific course offerings remained few.

In the early years, this arrangement satisfied the objectives of both state schools and the Church's educational program. But over time, both sides began to rethink the matter. The Church was not comfortable avoiding LDS content and increasingly moved LDS courses to the core of institute offerings. State colleges, under pressure from the ACLU and others concerned about the separation of church and state, began to back away from credit for any institute classes, regardless of content.¹⁰⁹

Using the Book of Mormon in Seminary. In the early 1950s, young seminary teacher and administrator Boyd K. Packer piloted an early-morning Book of Mormon class for Brigham City high school seniors who had already graduated from seminary. Thirty attended the first year, almost fifty the second. This positive response got the attention of William E. Berrett, administrator of seminaries and institutes, and the Book of Mormon was soon incorporated into the standard seminary curriculum.¹¹⁰ A. Theodore Tuttle, a close associate of Packer's in those years, believed that more seminary students were converted to the gospel of Christ when the Book of Mormon was taught than through teaching the Old and New Testaments.¹¹¹

The Book of Mormon in Literature, Art, and Music

My research in this area is only cursory. For present purposes, however, it suffices to note in passing that the developments that played themselves out in Church curricular circles have direct analogues in the arts and letters. The FARMS bibliography shows that creative writing based on the Book of Mormon, including fiction, began early but has increased only modestly. In the first half of this century, Mormon writers as a group have been described by literary analysts as a "lost generation" who were often ambivalent toward the religious tradition that seemed to many of them to have failed. BYU English professor Edward A. Geary has pointed out that their discouragement with the economic conditions in Utah often included a sense of decline in the Church itself.¹¹² More recent creative writing is generally supportive of the Church as a divine institution and the Book of Mormon as a record of an ancient people.¹¹³

I have made no systematic effort to count creative works in the visual arts or in music. Book of Mormon themes in the visual arts are difficult to quantify, but several artists stand out. Minerva Teichert (1888–1976) is still the undisputed queen of Book of Mormon painting, dedicating most of her life to this subject. She produced more than forty Book of Mormon paintings in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which were later donated to Brigham Young University.¹¹⁴ Arnold Friberg (1913–), a popular LDS illustrator, accepted the invitation from General Primary President Adele Cannon Howells to paint twelve dramatic Book of Mormon scenes that were serialized in the *Children's Friend* beginning in 1953.¹¹⁵ Friberg explained

his approach: "I try to bring into reality the stories so often taught in Sunday School. These stories are not mere allegory; they happened to real people who had names, jobs, and grandchildren. . . . Through my paintings I bear witness to the truth as I understand it."¹¹⁶ James C. Christensen has produced several well-known paintings on Book of Mormon themes, and J. Leo Fairbanks has had a number of his Book of Mormon paintings published in Church magazines. The Church's Second International Arts Competition in 1991 inspired a number of Book of Mormon entries, possibly because of President Benson's emphasis. Pageants celebrating the Book of Mormon have proliferated in the second half of the twentieth century. The Hill Cumorah Pageant remains the largest, claiming attendance of well over one hundred thousand during its yearly seven-night run in upstate New York.

Reasons for the Emphasis on the Book of Mormon at the Close of the Twentieth Century

Several factors account for the data presented above, which demonstrate the prominent role the Book of Mormon enjoys in the life of the Church at the present time. In addition to the general Church programs that have fostered the Book of Mormon in word and deed, four catalysts or conditions in particular have proved especially noteworthy.

Ezra Taft Benson's Emphasis on the Book of Mormon. President Benson's remarks at the April 1986 general conference, the first of his presidency, included several calls to the Church to emphasize Book of Mormon study. Probably more than any other single factor, his counsel stimulated an enthusiastic wave of Book of Mormon study and focus that continues to this day. Before becoming President, Elder Benson had consistently emphasized the Book of Mormon. Without the mantle of prophet, seer, and revelator, his urging did not carry quite the weight it later would.

As his son Reed describes, President Benson had an experience as a missionary that left a strong impression on him. He and his companion had been invited to speak to a group antagonistic to the Church. While he had "spent considerable time preparing his talk on the apostasy," when he stood up, he was prompted to speak of only the Book of Mormon.¹¹⁷

Elder Benson's April 1975 general conference address was entitled "The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God"¹¹⁸ and was widely reprinted and used. In regional and stake conferences, he regularly emphasized his testimony of the Book of Mormon as a text for our times and urged the Saints to "make the study of the Book of Mormon a lifetime pursuit."¹¹⁹ His biographer further reports that he was a constant advocate in the councils of the Church for focusing missionary efforts on the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon, he taught, was compiled by those who foresaw the latter days and who abridged centuries of records, selecting events, stories,

and speeches that would be most helpful to Saints of the latter days. It would bring men to Christ; it would expose the enemies of Christ; it would testify that Joseph Smith was a prophet. And in a troubled world filled with uncertainty, it bore another witness of the Savior and his mission.¹²⁰

Elder Benson and other Church leaders, such as Gordon B. Hinckley and Marion G. Romney,¹²¹ had been preaching this message for decades, and as head of the Church, President Benson turned up the volume and increased the frequency. In a 1989 BYU Education Week lecture, Elder James M. Paramore gave a personal insight into these developments:

I'll never forget his first remarks to the General Authorities after he was called as prophet. He said to us: "Brethren, I've read many of your talks again, and they are wonderful, but you don't use the Book of Mormon enough. May I ask you to know it and use it more, to testify of it to the world, and to have it go into every corner of the world."¹²²

During this same decade, President Benson's use of the Book of Mormon in conference addresses doubled.¹²³ These continued references to the Book of Mormon by Church leaders indicate that consistent emphasis on that book shows no sign of abating.¹²⁴

Correlated Curriculum. A second very significant development that has promoted LDS interest in the Book of Mormon is a correlated curriculum, which places the scriptures at the center of all gospel study.¹²⁵ Richard Cowan recalls that the correlation movement was initiated by President David O. McKay, who called Elder Harold B. Lee to head the correlation effort.¹²⁶ The dictum of President Lee to "close down the mines and open the refineries"¹²⁷ underlines the fundamental mission of correlation—to focus greater attention on the scriptural texts. As a member of the Sunday School General Board in the early 1970s, Truman Madsen recalls that he and his associates caught Elder Lee's vision: "We were determined . . . to put the scriptures at the center of the Gospel Doctrine curriculum and to rewrite manuals so they enhanced rather than replaced the scriptures."¹²⁸

Confirmation of the effectiveness of this program comes ironically from its detractors. BYU history professor and former "swearing elder"



Courtesy Busath Photography

Ezra Taft Benson, 1990. President Benson led the Church to use and distribute the Book of Mormon more extensively.

Richard D. Poll pinpointed the advent of the correlation program under the guidance of Harold B. Lee as the critical moment when “intellectual inquiry” was eliminated from Church education. Without noticing the correlated curriculum’s dramatic new focus on scriptural texts, Poll complained that “the centerpiece of Correlation was to be a standardized and sanitized instructional curriculum.” He went on to claim that “Correlation is the primary contributor to the sense of isolation, even alienation, that many reflective Latter-day Saints feel in the Church today” and that “the official instructional programs in all Church organizations are designed to inhibit thoughtful discussion.”¹²⁹

In fact, however, the powerful effect of the correlated curriculum was felt more strongly in other ways. In contrast to the practices in the first half of the century, both Sunday School classes for adults and CES classes for students became continually focused on the scriptures, and the Book of Mormon took center stage. As discussed above, the adult Gospel Doctrine classes in Sunday School since 1972 have had the four standard works as their curriculum. While this study does not measure in any direct way what the impact of this scriptural curriculum might have been, observers believe that those Latter-day Saints who follow this curriculum and their own family and individual scripture study, as encouraged by Church leaders, have become increasingly literate in their thoughtful reflection on scriptural matters, especially concerning the Book of Mormon, which in the 1980s took a leading role.

New Editions of the Standard Works and Reference Apparatus. Third, in 1979 the Church published an updated edition of the Bible and the Bible Dictionary, followed two years later by an updated triple combination with index. These landmark editions featured new chapter headings written by Elder Bruce R. McConkie and an elaborate system of footnotes, maps, and other study aids. The goal of the project was to make the scriptural texts more accessible.¹³⁰ Members were encouraged anew to study the scriptures regularly and to carry their scriptures to all meetings so that they could follow along with talks that quoted or analyzed scriptural passages. These publications make readers of all four standard works continually aware of passages in the Book of Mormon. While I offer no empirical measure of the effect of these new editions, many observers see a clear increase in personal scripture ownership and use.

Computerized Access to Scriptural Texts. The availability of computers to assist in complex scriptural searches is also having a notable impact on speaking in Church and publications on scriptural topics. In April 1988, the Church released the four standard works on disk with the powerful WordCruncher software to manage searches. In an *Ensign* interview, Elders Packer and Nelson explained the history behind this software development. Beginning in 1958, Professor Eldin Ricks of the BYU Ancient

Scripture Department supervised the entering of the scriptures into campus computers through punch cards. His project provided the basis for the “comprehensive cross-references and topical guide” released with the new scripture editions.¹³¹ In 1983, James Rosenvall and Monte Shelley of BYU’s Instructional Services Department began programming WordCruncher as a powerful personal computer software program that could index and display large texts. By 1985, Elders Nelson and Packer had begun meeting with the BYU programmers and testing their application with the standard works. The low-cost program has enjoyed wide use throughout the Church under the title *The Computerized Scriptures of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.

The release of the scriptures on disk stimulated private ventures that produced, most notably, the *Infobase* CD-ROM version of the LDS Scriptures, first released in 1991. The effect of these powerful computer tools is evident in a growing number of computer-aided scriptural research projects and in Church discourses at all levels. All of these resources make it easier to study and use the Book of Mormon.

Scholarly Studies of the Book of Mormon through the Century

A final indicator of the strong maturation of knowledge about the Book of Mormon over the course of the twentieth century is the growing number of academic disciplines seriously engaged in rigorous study of the Book of Mormon and related fields beyond the official programs of the Church. Of these many disciplines, only a few will be discussed here.

Book of Mormon Archaeology and Geography Studies. Interest in the Book of Mormon has at various times been fueled by efforts to determine the geographical location of the events the book records and to document archaeological artifacts from the ancient American civilizations that might derive from the Nephites or Lamanites.¹³² In 1890, George Q. Cannon, First Counselor in the First Presidency, affirmed that there had been no revelation on the issue and the First Presidency has never stated differently, a position that was reiterated by President Anton H. Lund in 1928.¹³³

In 1938, Joseph Fielding Smith spoke out against those who argued for a Book of Mormon geography that limited its people to small regions in the New World, and open discussion on such matters became more difficult.¹³⁴ The efforts of Jakeman, Ferguson, and Franklin S. Harris Jr. to open the question of locating the Nephite Hill Cumorah outside of New York were greeted with suspicion and hostility. Various organizational efforts among the serious students of these questions led eventually to the establishment of two organizations, the New World Archaeological Foundation and the Society for Early Historical Archaeology. These sometimes competing groups pushed the discussion forward with their research,

conferences, and publications, though the Church rarely included their theories or findings in its manuals or magazines.¹³⁵

In 1984 a noteworthy event reopened and expanded discussion on the subject. The *Ensign* published a cautious, two-part precis of John L. Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, published in full in 1985.¹³⁶ To the present day, the Church maintains a hands-off policy on the scientific or scholarly elements of these unofficial studies and publications. While Sorenson's limited Book of Mormon geography has attracted broad support among students of these questions, including many General Authorities, no official view of Book of Mormon geography has been adopted by the Church. Geographical questions are pursued by most in a spirit of simply seeking for a better understanding of the book itself, rather than in a polemical mode. The success of these efforts, however, was indicated in part when the Smithsonian Institution recently stopped circulating a long-standing statement that flatly denied the possibility of the Book of Mormon being consistent with the findings of Mesoamerican archaeology.¹³⁷

A Foundation for Faithful Book of Mormon Scholarship. Prior to the 1970s, scholarly work on the Book of Mormon by such key authors as George Reynolds, B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, Francis W. Kirkham, Sidney B. Sperry, and Hugh W. Nibley focused heavily on external evidence for the veracity of the book.¹³⁸ These men, all highly educated, provided the only serious writing on the Book of Mormon, but their approaches were often considered too literal and faithful to be compatible with those of a liberal academic orientation.

George Reynolds was perhaps the first to do serious and thorough analytic work focused on the text of the Book of Mormon. He produced a concordance, a dictionary, and numerous substantive analyses of the book and its contents during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹³⁹

Roberts's writings on the Book of Mormon in the first third of the twentieth century were extensive and widely circulated. Despite recent efforts to suggest that Roberts had serious doubts about the historicity of the Book of Mormon,¹⁴⁰ arguments by Truman Madsen and John W. Welch are persuasive that Roberts held fast to his testimony of it. Well aware of the fashionable arguments of biblical higher criticism, which cast doubts on the historicity of the Bible and indirectly did the same to the Book of Mormon, Roberts believed that the conclusions of the biblical scholars were faulty.¹⁴¹ He stressed that the scriptural texts must stand preeminent and that their claims should be accepted by faith sustained by reason.¹⁴²

Widtsoe wrote serialized publications that addressed the reconciliation of faith with scientific and other modern questions, often including responses to questions about the Book of Mormon. His Church magazine

articles were later collected and printed as *Evidences and Reconciliations*.¹⁴³ Widtsoe also wrote with Franklin S. Harris a defense of the historical claims of the Book of Mormon in *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon: A Collection of Evidences*.¹⁴⁴

Francis Kirkham was similarly concerned with evidences for the Book of Mormon. In 1937 he published *Source Material Concerning the Origin of the Book of Mormon*, which was later expanded into the two-volume work *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon*.¹⁴⁵ Widtsoe acknowledged Kirkham as “the foremost scholar in this field” due to his vast research and reading on the Book of Mormon and its coming forth.¹⁴⁶

Polemics and Defensive Apologetics. Polemical efforts to refute the historicity of the Book of Mormon have in some cases spurred great interest in Book of Mormon studies and paradoxically furthered the cause of belief. A case in point is the work of Fawn Brodie, niece of Church President David O. McKay. In the late 1930s, Brodie began a short essay on the nineteenth-century sources of the Book of Mormon. Her work evolved into a biography of Joseph Smith that explained his visions as delusions.¹⁴⁷ The book was praised in the literary world, and a perception developed in the LDS community that the academic world also endorsed it. A recent survey of scholarly reviews, however, shows that the book was not entirely well received by historians.¹⁴⁸ The weakness of Brodie’s approach was further exposed by academic historians after she used the same questionable psycho-historical techniques to write an exposé of Thomas Jefferson.¹⁴⁹

Brodie may have been correct in thinking that she was only making explicit what a lot of Mormon intellectuals already believed. But if Brodie’s effort was intended to put an end to the persistent orthodoxy represented in President Clark’s 1938 statement to the CES faculty, it may have had just the opposite effect. She provoked the young Hugh Nibley, who had recently completed his Ph.D. in ancient history at Berkeley, to carefully examine her sources and logic. Nibley himself had gone through a brief skeptical phase during his graduate years, but a series of dramatic personal religious experiences had left him without any doubts about the reality of the spiritual world and the truth of the Restoration through Joseph Smith. Nibley responded to Brodie’s *No Man Knows My History*¹⁵⁰ with a series of devastating attacks on the reliability of her work that he labeled collectively *No Ma’am, That’s Not History*.¹⁵¹

A crucial issue for Nibley was Brodie’s claim that the Book of Mormon was written in the 1820s and was not, therefore, an ancient book as Joseph Smith claimed. Bringing to bear his formidable background in ancient languages and history, Nibley undertook what was to become a lifelong inquiry into the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon. He found a flood of parallels between the ancient world and the Book of Mormon. The large

majority of the parallels were drawn from texts and historical facts that have been uncovered since the Book of Mormon was first published. Nibley asks time after time, how is it that Joseph Smith in 1829 could throw some passing detail into the Book of Mormon text that squared with scholarly knowledge that would not be available for years or even decades? How did he always hit the bull's-eye, issue after issue? Joseph Smith and his contemporaries in upstate New York were uneducated, and the whole scholarly world in 1829 was relatively ignorant on many of these issues. Nibley concluded that Joseph Smith could not have written the Book of Mormon himself and must have translated an ancient document, as he claimed.

Nibley's studies were frequently serialized in Church magazines and collected in volumes. His *Lehi in the Desert* (1950) and *The World of the Jaredites* (1951)¹⁵² broke new ground for LDS audiences and "kept the Book of Mormon very visible in front of the Church."¹⁵³ These scholarly efforts were based on a premise that had been discounted in liberal Mormon thought for decades and directly attacked in Brodie's book. Combined with the archaeological and geographical work of John Sorenson and others, Nibley's focus on antiquities in the Book of Mormon helped believing Latter-day Saints understand their scripture as a legitimate ancient text, written by real people who lived in real places and received real visions and revelations.

In the mid-1950s, the Church invited Nibley to bring his work together in one volume that could serve as a priesthood lesson manual. His *Approach to the Book of Mormon* (1957)¹⁵⁴ provided enormous stimulation and food for thought to Latter-day Saints everywhere and put the case for a literally true Book of Mormon squarely on the table. A skeptical BYU faculty member who was teaching out of Nibley's manual commented to him, "I didn't take the Book of Mormon seriously at all, but you've got me wondering."¹⁵⁵

During the writing process, Nibley found out that the Church was not fully ready for his approach. The committee that oversaw his work turned down every chapter on the grounds that people would not be able to understand his arguments or evidence. President David O. McKay overruled the committee in each instance, saying, "Well, if you think it's over their heads, let them reach for it. We have to give them something more than pat answers."¹⁵⁶ Nibley continued publishing on the Book of Mormon in the *Improvement Era*, the most important work being his series "Since Cumorah," which was released in book form in 1967.

Nibley's efforts did not attract or seek a great deal of support or collaboration from his BYU colleagues, few of whom had the background to do similar work. Nibley did, however, inspire a generation of his students who eventually became professors themselves, principally at BYU. By the

1970s the scholarly work of this next generation began to appear, in particular with the work of Kent Brown, Wilfred Griggs, William Hamblin, Paul Hoskisson, Kent Jackson, John Lundquist, Ann Madsen, Daniel Peterson, Michael Rhodes, Stephen Ricks, Stephen Robinson, David Seely, and John Welch, along with the contributions of Marilyn Arnold, Paul Cheesman, Ross Christenson, Gary Gillum, Cynthia Hallen, Monte Nyman, Catherine Thomas, Gordon Thomasson, John Tvedtnes, David Whittaker, and others.

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). In 1979, John W. Welch organized the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). Welch's vision was to create a support institution for scholarly research and publication premised on the Book of Mormon's antiquity. Growth in the first five years was rapid, and by the late 1980s increasing numbers of scholars from a variety of disciplines had become interested in lending their expertise to some aspect of Book of Mormon studies. Financial support grew as ideas for new scholarly projects matured.

By the mid-1990s, the sustained and expanding scholarly output of believing Latter-day Saints had become a force to be reckoned with, in large part because of FARMS. The sheer volume of scholarly investigation that finds the Book of Mormon text credible and related to the ancient world in countless ways left critics far behind. Where they had once been the agenda setters, they could no longer keep up.

One attempt by critics to recapture the initiative appeared in 1993. Editor Brent Metcalfe compiled a collection of essays into *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*,¹⁵⁷ which was intended to administer a great blow to the Book of Mormon's prospects of ever being taken seriously as a genuinely ancient book. This effort, however, fell short. Few of the contributors were recognized, publishing scholars. A large portion of their arguments were readily refutable with already published studies. And they had studiously avoided responding substantively to the many competent studies in support of the book's authenticity. These defects and more were explored in the 1994 and 1995 volumes of the FARMS annual *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*.¹⁵⁸

In the 1990s, FARMS has published a steady stream of books, journals, articles, newsletters, updates, and reviews about the Book of Mormon. In recognition of the focused contributions of FARMS in coordinating research on the Book of Mormon and making significant results inexpensively available worldwide, President Gordon B. Hinckley invited FARMS in September 1997 to become a part of BYU. In directing this strong step toward the future, he expressed his desire to see the work of FARMS grow even further.

A New Day for the Book of Mormon

In retrospect, it seems truly miraculous that the general intellectual climate of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not permanently disorient the LDS community from its commitments to its origins in the revelations received by Joseph Smith. The positivist assumption that held sway in the mid-twentieth century, asserting that anything not detectable by scientific means does not exist, has produced at least two generations of thinkers in almost every religious tradition who find revelation and direct relationships with God impossible or irrelevant. Students trained in philosophy, the humanities, history, and the social sciences were most vulnerable, as most graduate schools offered little alternative to atheistic assumptions as beginning points for all respectable intellectual endeavor.¹⁵⁹ Bright LDS graduate students were usually not prepared to understand the limitations of religious skepticism, and they frequently lost whatever spiritual testimony they had or found their own budding doubts permanently reinforced. Not until Chauncey Riddle obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia University in the 1950s and joined forces with fellow Columbia graduate student David Yarn and later Harvard graduate Truman Madsen did the Church have highly competent intellectuals who understood fully the philosophical options and could fortify future graduate students in their own faith. When one reads the biographies of leading cultural Mormons such as Sterling McMurrin or O. C. Tanner, one is struck by their lack of contact in their formative years with highly educated Latter-day Saints who were thoroughly grounded in the restored gospel. Cultural Mormons generally seemed to buy into the positivist assumption that if they were to take modern science and philosophy seriously, they had to abandon the faith of their fathers, at least as their fathers understood and experienced that faith. No one was showing them the limits of science and philosophy and how those limits pointed to the need for a gospel of revelation.

While some faithful members of the Church may well, for personal reasons, choose to keep their academic and religious lives completely separate from each other, many LDS scholars now openly defend the literal historical reality of the founding revelations and the Book of Mormon. Without exception, Mormon historians who teach in the BYU Department of Church History and Doctrine take this position, as do the wide range of scholars who publish with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). Because the Book of Mormon will undoubtedly continue to be a controversial subject, it seemed worthwhile to me to experiment with a group of scholars who had not previously been exposed to the Book of Mormon to see if they might find it worth their time to analyze the text carefully or to pay any attention to the growing scholarly literature on the Book of Mormon. Accordingly, I organized a small, private

conference of mostly non-LDS scholars that included both historians of American religious history and other text-oriented disciplines, with certain questions of political theory as the subject and the Book of Mormon as the text for discussion. Following the three-day meeting of the group in September 1997, one of the participating historians wrote the following letter to the Indianapolis-based sponsoring foundation.¹⁶⁰

Dr. G. M. Curtis, III
Liberty Fund, Inc. . . .

Dear Dr. Curtis:

Thank you so much for including me in the Liberty Fund conference on "Personal and Political Liberty in the *Book of Mormon*." The Liberty Fund is to be congratulated for having the imagination and courage to sponsor a conference on this subject, which was fully vindicated by the outcome.

Having taught the history of religion in the United States for some time (nineteen years at UCLA and six so far at Oxford) I was of course familiar with the *Book of Mormon* to some extent, and had read a good deal of it. However, I confess that it had not occurred to me that the text would bear the kind of close analysis to which our group of philosophers, political scientists, literary and historical specialists subjected it. My teaching and writing in the future will benefit from the enriched appreciation the seminar gave me for this complex and inspiring work. . . .

Signed,
Daniel W. Howe
Rhodes Professor of American History
Oxford University

Professor Howe's observations are consistent with the verbal comments of the other participants. Such responses indicate that historians can learn a great deal from intensive textual analysis of the Book of Mormon and that there might be reason to hope treatments of Mormon history in the future will pay more attention to the book's unique and complex content.

Other signs that the non-LDS academic world is beginning to take the Book of Mormon seriously come from surprising quarters. In 1996 two young evangelical scholars, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, undertook to assess the state of the debate between believing Latter-day Saint scholars and anti-Mormons regarding the Book of Mormon and related matters. They concluded that critics have grossly underestimated the quality of the literature in support of the Book of Mormon and that detractors of the Book of Mormon will have to rise to new levels of scholarly competence before they will be able to deal effectively with the current generation of LDS scholars and the large body of credible scientific work now supporting the plausibility of the Book of Mormon as history.¹⁶¹

While our data is often indirect and partial, the direction of Book of Mormon trends in the late twentieth century is consistent. The last few

decades have produced a significant revolution in the LDS community in terms of the increased understanding and competent appreciation for the Book of Mormon as an inspired work of ancient scripture. Latter-day Saint students are much more engaged with the text itself, and the curricula of the Church Educational System and the Sunday School are much more committed to a study of the text in a way that takes its authenticity seriously. In the wake of these strong developments, cultural-Mormon views of the Book of Mormon have been gradually pushed to the periphery of LDS intellectual and religious life.¹⁶² Today, LDS scholars and laymen generally strive to understand the Book of Mormon as an ancient document and to give diligent heed to Christ's gospel that it contains. Increasingly, non-LDS scholars are also willing to take a more serious look at the Book of Mormon in light of LDS scholarship.¹⁶³ It has truly been a remarkable century for the Book of Mormon.

Noel B. Reynolds is Associate Academic Vice President at Brigham Young University. He expresses profound appreciation to Allison D. Clark, who spent the seven months between her mission and the start of her graduate studies at Boston University as the research assistant on this project, and to FARMS for funding that research assistance. The author also thanks Ben Ahlstrom for work on the graphs and Theresa Brown for her assistance in all stages of this work. This research was first presented at a conference, Ancient Scriptures and the Restoration, held at BYU on June 7, 1997.

1. Ezra Taft Benson, "A Sacred Responsibility," *Ensign* 16 (May 1986): 78; Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 494.

2. Grant Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage in Early LDS Theology," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17 (autumn 1984): 52–53, 59; Jan Shipps and John W. Welch, eds., *The Journals of William E. McLellin* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 6, 7.

3. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 82.

4. The term "cultural Mormon" gained currency after Louis C. Midgley used it in his review of Hugh Nibley's *Since Cumorah* ("The Secular Relevance of the Gospel," *Dialogue* 4 [winter 1969]: 76–85) in reference to Latter-day Saints who are part of the LDS community but do not embrace orthodox teaching and practice. Cultural Mormons, like liberal Protestants or Jews, tend not to believe in visions or other forms of direct revelation or the scriptures that report such revelation.

5. Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage," 52–53.

6. Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage," 53.

7. Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage," 59.

8. W. W. Phelps, "Some of Mormon's Teachings," *Evening and Morning Star* 1 (January 1833): 60, quoted in Underwood, "Book of Mormon Usage," 59–60.

9. Alton D. Merrill, "An Analysis of the Papers and Speeches of Those Who Have Written or Spoken about the Book of Mormon, Published during the Years of 1830 to 1855 and 1915 to 1940, to Ascertain the Shift of Emphasis" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1940), 28–30. Merrill's study shows an interesting increase in the number of times the Book of Mormon is quoted in the *Millennial Star*: by the second period of his study (1915–1940), references are nine times greater than in the first period.

10. Shipps and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 22, 148. "By far the most frequent topic in [McLellin's] sermons was the Book of Mormon." Shipps and Welch, *Journals of William E. McLellin*, 19.
11. John Nicholson, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 22:23, February 6, 1881.
12. German E. Ellsworth, untitled general conference talk, *Conference Reports* (June 1919), 95–96.
13. German E. Ellsworth, untitled general conference talk, *Conference Reports* (April 1908), 42.
14. Marion G. Romney, untitled general conference talks, *Conference Reports* (April 1949), 35–36; (April 1960), 110–11; "The Book of Mormon," *Ensign* 10 (May 1980): 66.
15. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God," *Ensign* 5 (May 1975): 65. See Richard C. Galbraith, *Scriptural Citation to Ensign General Conference Reports, April 1971–April 1995*, unpublished manuscript, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
16. Richard C. Galbraith, *Data on General Conference Reports, 1942–1995*, unpublished manuscript, Harold B. Lee Library.
17. Allison D. Clark, "Analysis of General Conference Talks 1950–1995," unpublished manuscript. The author has deposited this document in the Harold B. Lee Library.
18. John A. Widstoe and Franklin S. Harris Jr., *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon: A Collection of Evidences* (Independence, Mo.: Zion's Printing and Publishing, 1935).
19. Allison D. Clark, "FARMS Preliminary Report on Missionary Plans and Materials Used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1900–1995," unpublished manuscript, 1–2. The author has deposited this document in the Harold B. Lee Library.
20. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 2; Richard L. Anderson, interview by Allison D. Clark, April 2, 1996, 4. The author has deposited in the Harold B. Lee Library all interviews by Allison D. Clark.
21. Autobiography of Dessie Verene Worthington, 16, as quoted in letter by John C. Thomas to Noel B. Reynolds, May 16, 1997, in possession of the author.
22. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 2–3.
23. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 3.
24. Glenn L. Pearson, interview by Allison D. Clark, April 15, 1996, 1–2; Reid E. Bankhead, interview by Allison D. Clark, April 18, 1996, 1–2.
25. Anderson, interview, 2.
26. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 4.
27. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 4.
28. Truman G. Madsen, interview by Allison D. Clark, March 12, 1996, 1.
29. Robert J. Matthews, interview by Allison D. Clark, April 22, 1996, 2.
30. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 4.
31. Anderson, interview, 3.
32. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 5.
33. Richard Cowan, interview by Allison D. Clark, April 8, 1996, 6.
34. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 5.
35. Reid E. Bankhead and Glenn L. Pearson, "Missionary Work with the Book of Mormon: Cumorah Mission, 1967," unpublished manuscript, Library Division, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; Bankhead, interview, 7.
36. Madsen, interview, 8.
37. Hugh Nibley, interview by Allison D. Clark, June 1996, 13.
38. Clark, "Missionary Plans and Materials," 5.

39. Matthews, interview, 8, 10–11.
40. Arlene Crawley, “The Beginnings of the Family to Family Program,” in *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon*, ed. Eugene England (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 10–19.
41. See Cory Maylett, “Significant English Editions, Additions” [chart], *Church News*, published by *Deseret News*, January 2, 1988, 2; “Appendix,” in *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1996).
42. Hugh G. Stocks, “Book of Mormon Translations,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:213.
43. Parry, Miller, and Thorne, *Book of Mormon Bibliography*. For this study we rearranged the electronic version of the *Bibliography* chronologically to yield year-by-year summaries. Allison Clark sorted each entry into the categories described.
44. See Lance D. Chase, “Spaulding Manuscript,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1402–3; Richard C. Roberts, “View of the Hebrews,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1509–10.
45. Allison D. Clark, “FARMS Preliminary Report on Sunday School Manuals Used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1900–1995,” unpublished manuscript. The author has deposited this document in the Harold B. Lee Library. This review indicates that there is a fair amount of continuity in approach throughout the century, with historical and doctrinal elements receiving regular attention. While we surveyed all manuals in the Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Harold B. Lee Library, these holdings are not complete for all years. Consequently, this article analyzes only the materials that have survived in those repositories.
46. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 4.
47. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 5.
48. B. Lloyd Poelman, “Sunday School,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 3:1426.
49. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 1, 9.
50. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 2, 12.
51. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 1, 9–11.
52. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 7–9.
53. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 10.
54. Clark, “Report on Sunday School Manuals,” 11–15.
55. Poelman, “Sunday School,” 3:1426–27.
56. Poelman, “Sunday School,” 3:1426–27.
57. Poelman, “Sunday School,” 3:1427.
58. Cowan, interview, 4.
59. Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, 4 vols. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975–76), 1:524.
60. Robert J. Matthews, “Perspective: A Look at Religious Education at BYU,” unpublished essay presented at pre-school meeting for Religious Education full-time faculty, August 28, 1985, 8. The author has deposited this document in the Harold B. Lee Library.
61. Cowan, interview, 3.
62. Richard Sherlock, “Campus in Crisis: BYU, 1911,” *Sunstone* 4 (January/February 1979): 10–16.
63. Sherlock, “Campus in Crisis,” 11–12, 14.
64. Sherlock, “Campus in Crisis,” 12–13.
65. Horace Cummings to President Joseph F. Smith and Members of the General Church Board of Education, January 21, 1911, quoted in Sherlock, “Campus in Crisis,” 12.

66. Cummings to President Smith, quoted in Sherlock, "Campus in Crisis," 13.
67. Sherlock, "Campus in Crisis," 14–15.
68. Cummings to President Smith, quoted in Sherlock, "Campus in Crisis," 13.
69. Horace H. Cummings, "Autobiography of Horace Cummings," lesson 41, page 6, photocopy of unpublished typescript in Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter cited as BYU Special Collections), quoted with slight variations in Wilkinson, *The First One Hundred Years*, 1:421–22. Brimhall left no written record of the dream in his papers. See footnote 46 in Wilkinson, *The First One Hundred Years*, 1:422. Also quoted in Boyd K. Packer, "The Snow-White Birds," *Brigham Young Magazine* 49, no. 4 (November 1995): 48–49; Boyd K. Packer, "Spiritual Orientation: Three Addresses," in *Educating Zion*, ed. John W. Welch and Don E. Norton (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1996), 187.
70. George H. Brimhall to Horace Cummings, March 17, 1911; Brimhall to Joseph F. Smith, March 17, 1911; Brimhall to Reed Smoot, March 8, 1911, quoted in Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 142.
71. Wilkinson, *The First One Hundred Years*, 1:423–24.
72. Bergera and Priddis, *A House of Faith*, 147–48.
73. Fawn McKay Brodie, "Fawn McKay Brodie: An Oral History Interview," interview by Shirley E. Stephenson, *Dialogue* 14 (summer 1981): 102.
74. These professors were: Edgar J. Goodspeed, William C. Graham, John T. McNeill, and William C. Bower. Russel B. Swensen, "Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School: A Personal Reminiscence," *Dialogue* 7 (summer 1972): 40. See also Wilkinson, *The First One Hundred Years*, 2:287–88.
75. Swensen, "Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School," 40. Russel Swensen, Daryl Chase, and George S. Tanner were the initial three chosen to attend the University of Chicago Divinity School. O. C. Tanner reports in his autobiography that he was also invited by Merrill to attend but refused, fearing the Church support would compromise his "intellectual integrity." Obert C. Tanner, *One Man's Journey: In Search of Freedom* (Salt Lake City: The Humanities Center at the University of Utah, 1994), 111.
76. Swensen, "Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School," 44–45. Other students who were encouraged to attend the UC Divinity School included: T. Edgar Lyon, Carl J. Furr, Heber C. Snell, Vernon Larsen, Wesley P. Lloyd, Therald N. Jensen, and Anthony S. Cannon. Not all took on skeptical views. For example, Lyon spent his life helping students to maintain their faith.
77. Nibley, interview, 7–8.
78. Wilkinson, *The First One Hundred Years*, 2:453–55.
79. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "The Charted Course of the Church in Education" (Address given at BYU Alpine Summer School to Church educators), 1938, in BYU Special Collections; reprinted in *Educating Zion*, ed. Welch and Norton, 16, 21.
80. Chauncey C. Riddle, interview by Allison D. Clark, February 26, 1996, 2.
81. Blake Ostler, "An Interview with Sterling McMurrin," *Dialogue* 17 (spring 1984): 24.
82. Based on a review of Brigham Young University General Course Catalogs, years 1930–1990, in BYU Special Collections.
83. Nibley, interview, 7.
84. Wilkinson, *The First One Hundred Years*, 2:381–3.
85. Wilkinson, *The First One Hundred Years*, 2:385–6.
86. Brigham D. Madsen, *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Western Historian* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1998), 226.
87. Russel Swensen, Oral History, 27, quoted in Bergera, *A House of Faith*, 61.

88. Ostler, "Interview with Sterling McMurrin," 26. See also Sterling M. McMurrin and L. Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 105–27.

89. David Yarn, interview by Allison D. Clark, February 21, 1996, 16. These facts have been confirmed on the public record in recently published interviews. See also McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*.

90. Ostler, "Interview with Sterling McMurrin," 25.

91. Ostler, "Interview with Sterling McMurrin," 25.

92. Ellis T. Rasmussen, "Sidney B. Sperry—Student of the Book of Mormon," *Ensign* 16 (July 1986): 24; David H. Yarn Jr., "Sidney B. Sperry: A Reminiscence," in *They Gladly Taught: Ten BYU Professors*, ed. Jean Anne Waterstradt, 3 vols. (Provo: Brigham Young University and the Emeritus Club, 1986–88), 1:171.

93. Anderson, interview, 1, 9–10; Bankhead, interview, 2–3; Matthews, interview, 6; Pearson, interview, 2, 6; Ellis Rasmussen, interview by Allison D. Clark, February 27, 1996, 2, 8; Riddle, interview, 1–2; Yarn, interview, 1–4.

94. Yarn, "Sperry Reminiscence," 169.

95. Riddle, interview, 2.

96. Yarn, interview, 6.

97. Nibley, interview, 5.

98. Matthews, interview, 10.

99. Nibley, interview, 7. See Thomas A. Blakely, "The Swearing Elders," *Sunstone* 10 (September 1985): 8–13; Richard D. Poll, "The Swearing Elders: Some Reflections: A Response to Thomas Blakely," *Sunstone* 10 (September 1985): 14–17; McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 181–84, 191–92.

The O. C. Tanner case is particularly interesting because Tanner may have eventually softened his antagonism toward the Book of Mormon. President McKay was persuaded by his son Llwelyn to authorize an invitation from the Sunday School to Tanner to write a Gospel Doctrine manual, in spite of Tanner's fairly well-known skepticism regarding many fundamental claims of the Church. Tanner, *One Man's Journey*, 115–21. Glenn L. Pearson remembers this kind of assignment as a common occurrence: "The general boards would pass out the assignments to various individuals, and half the time they weren't even believers." Because the particular manual (*Christ's Ideals for Living*) required a treatment of 3 Nephi, Tanner decided he would have to read the Book of Mormon, and in the process concluded that the Book of Mormon was true after all. "He hadn't believed it for years and years." Pearson, interview, 16. Pearson heard the story from Elder Harold B. Lee in the 1954 seminar for CES teachers, and Pearson later pursued the matter in private conversation with Elder Lee. Elder Lee's point in sharing the story with CES personnel was to show that someone with Tanner's views could gain a testimony and should not be written off as hopeless. Tanner's autobiography confirms his doubts in these matters but gives no hint he changed his mind. It may be that Elder Lee interpreted Tanner's report of increased appreciation for the message of the Book of Mormon as increased belief in its historicity.

100. Packer, "Snow-White Birds," 48.

101. Lucile Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 117.

102. Tate, *Watchman*, 120.

103. Packer, "Snow-White Birds," 48.

104. Based on a review of Brigham Young University Class Schedules, years 1936–1995, in BYU Special Collections. The number of Book of Mormon sections in

relation to the size of the student body after the Book of Mormon course was required for freshmen soon leveled off to where it had been in the 1950s. We have not been able to determine the extent to which average section size increased.

105. Yarn, interview, 6–7.

106. A copy of the letter advanced to the board of trustees is in my possession, courtesy of Glenn L. Pearson.

107. Yarn, interview, 7–8; Harvard Heath, interview by Allison D. Clark, May 6, 1996, 2–4.

108. William O. Nelson, “The Institutes of Religion Curriculum: Its History, Evaluation, and a Method Designed for Determining Whether Courses of Study Meet the Criteria of Certain Basic Doctrines and Objectives” (Ed.D. diss., BYU, 1971), 46, 47, 52–53.

109. Based on telephone conversations with various CES personnel, July 28, 1997. See also Karla Haworth, “Idaho State U. Accused of Giving Credit for Church-Sponsored Classes,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Daily News (internet version), October 16, 1997.

110. Tate, *Watchman*, 101.

111. Matthews, interview, 9.

112. Edward A. Geary, “Mormondom’s Lost Generation: The Novelists of the 1940s,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 1 (1977): 91–92.

113. See Eugene England, “Mormon Literature: Progress and Prospects,” in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1995), 469–505; Eugene England, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years,” *BYU Studies* 22, no. 2 (1982): 131–60.

114. These paintings are now readily seen in John W. Welch and Doris R. Dant, *The Book of Mormon Paintings of Minerva Teichert* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies; Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997).

115. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Susan Staker Oman, *Sisters and Little Saints: One Hundred Years of Primary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 121.

116. Richard G. Oman and Robert O. Davis, *Images of Faith: Art of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 102.

117. Reed Benson, interview by Allison D. Clark, April 4, 1996, 3.

118. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God,” *Ensign* 5 (May 1975): 63–65.

119. Ezra Taft Benson, quoted in Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 491–92.

120. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 492.

121. Allison D. Clark, “General Conference Analysis,” unpublished data. The author has deposited this document in the Harold B. Lee Library.

122. James M. Paramore, “Leadership—Jesus Was the Perfect Leader,” *Brigham Young University 1989–90 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1990), 7.

123. Galbraith, “Data on General Conference Reports.”

124. For other examples of Church leaders emphasizing the Book of Mormon, see Dallin H. Oaks, “Another Testament of Jesus Christ,” *Brigham Young University 1992–93 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1993), 111–22; Richard G. Scott, “True Friends That Lift,” *Ensign* 18 (November 1988): 76–77; Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant: The Messianic Message of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997).

125. Wayne B. Lynn, “Curriculum,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:347–52; Frank O. May Jr., “Correlation of the Church, Administration,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:323–25.

126. Cowan, interview, 8.

127. Madsen, interview, 7.
128. Madsen, interview, 6.
129. Poll, "The Swearing Elders: Some Reflections," 17.
130. Rasmussen, interview, 4.
131. "Computerized Scriptures Now Available: A Conversation with Elder Boyd K. Packer and Elder Russell M. Nelson about the New Computerized Scriptures," *Ensign* 18 (April 1988): 74.
132. John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 16–18; Bergera, *A House of Faith*, 10–12.
133. Sorenson, *Geography*, 16–17, 20.
134. Sorenson, *Geography*, 23.
135. Sorenson, *Geography*, 26–29.
136. John L. Sorenson, "Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture," parts 1 and 2, *Ensign* 14 (September 1984): 26–37; (October 1984): 12–23; John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985).
137. See "New Light: Smithsonian Statement on the Book of Mormon Revised," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998), 77.
138. Truman Madsen comments on the transformation of his own interest in the Book of Mormon: "In younger days I was concerned with the question: what is the evidence for the Book of Mormon? Now I am preoccupied with what is the Book of Mormon evidence for? For me it is a window to Christ. I am less interested in studying the frame, or the composition of the glass, or the spots on the pane, than I am in looking through." Madsen, interview, 9.
139. See the summary of George Reynolds's contributions in Bruce A. Van Orden's review of the dictionary in "Every City, Hill, River, Valley, and Person," *FARMS Review of Books* 8, no. 1 (1996): 51–60.
140. Brigham D. Madsen, "B. H. Roberts's Studies of the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue* 26 (fall 1993): 77–86.
141. John W. Welch, "Introduction," in B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. John W. Welch, 2d ed. (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1996), xxvi–xxvii.
142. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*. See also *B. H. Roberts' Final Decade: Statements about the Book of Mormon (1921–33)*, comp. Truman G. Madsen, unpublished manuscript, FARMS, Brigham Young University. John W. Welch, "B. H. Roberts: Seeker after Truth," *Ensign* 16 (March 1986): 56–62.
143. John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations: Volumes 1, 2, and 3*, arr. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960).
144. Widtsoe and Harris, *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon*.
145. Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon*, 2 vols. (Independence, Mo.: Zion's Printing and Publishing, 1942–51).
146. Francis W. Kirkham, "Oral History Interview with Dr. Francis W. Kirkham," interview by Hollis Scott, November 4, 1966, 28. The author has deposited this document in the Harold B. Lee Library.
147. Brodie, "Fawn McKay Brodie," 104.
148. Louis C. Midgley, "F. M. Brodie—'The Fasting Hermit and Very Saint of Ignorance': A Biographer and Her Legend," *FARMS Review of Books* 8, no. 2 (1996): 148–51.
149. Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974). For a critique of the book, see Louis C. Midgley, "The Brodie Connection: Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 20, no. 1 (1979): 59–67.

150. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946).

151. Hugh W. Nibley, *No Ma'am, That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946).

152. Hugh W. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988).

153. Anderson, interview, 2.

154. Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, vol. 6 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988).

155. Unnamed faculty member quoted in Anderson, interview, 8.

156. Nibley, interview, 4.

157. Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).

158. *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994); Ross David Baron, "Melodie Moench Charles and the Humanist Worldview," 91–119, and Alan Goff, "Uncritical Theory and Thin Description: The Resistance to History," 170–207, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7, no. 1 (1995).

159. See, for example, Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 3–11, 213–24.

160. Daniel W. Howe, letter to G. M. Curtis, September 14, 1997, copy in possession of the author.

161. Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, "Mormon Scholarship, Apologetics and Evangelical Neglect: Losing the Battle and Not Knowing It?" *Trinity Journal of Theology*, 19NS (1998): 179–205.

162. See Louis Midgley, interview by Allison D. Clark, March 5, 1996.

163. Madsen, interview, 7–8. Matthews, interview, 9. This trend of increasing commitment to the Book of Mormon and other scriptures among educated Latter-day Saints is consistent with sociological studies that link religiosity and levels of education. The 1982 Princeton Religion Research Center survey data indicate that American religious communities show significant negative correlation between education and religiosity—as measured by devotion to private prayer, scripture study, church attendance, and other forms of religious activity. But for the LDS community, this correlation is reversed. In the LDS community, the more educated a person is, the more likely he or she is to be fully observant and faithful. Stan L. Albrecht and Tim B. Heaton, "Secularization, Higher Education, and Religiosity," *Review of Religious Research* 26, no. 1 (Sept. 1984): 47, 52–54.