

University of Nevada, Reno

THE SECRET MORMON MEETINGS OF 1922

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts in History

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Abstract

B. H. Roberts presented information to the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in January of 1922 that fundamentally challenged the entire premise of their religious beliefs. New research shows that in addition to church leadership, this information was also presented during the next few months to a select group of highly educated Mormon men and women outside of church hierarchy. This group represented many aspects of Mormon belief, different areas of expertise, and varying approaches to dealing with challenging information. Their stories create a beautiful tapestry of Mormon life in the transition years from polygamy, frontier life, and resistance to statehood, assimilation, and respectability. A study of the people involved illuminates an important, overlooked, underappreciated, and exciting period of Mormon history.

The information Roberts presented to both leadership and this group of Mormon intelligentsia remained hidden, denied, and ignored (but not forgotten) for over sixty years. It was discovered and published as *Studies of the Book of Mormon* in 1985. While focus has been placed on the documents themselves and on Roberts as either a top leader who lost his faith or as a “devil’s advocate” who was unconcerned about the contents of his studies, the impact of this information on the people who knew about them at that time has never been explored. In fact, it is often portrayed that no one but Roberts knew about the contents of his studies. This research demonstrates that dozens of people knew about the information contained in Roberts’s studies and that even when hidden and unaddressed, they had a large impact on Mormon culture and belief.

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Introduction

When the B. H. Roberts papers were published in 1985 by University of Illinois Press as *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, they caused quite a stir in Mormon circles.¹ Debate swirled about whether or not 1920s church leader and top intellectual Brigham Henry Roberts (who went by the initials B. H.) felt the highly critical issues he discussed in his papers were more than potential arguments that could be made against the Book of Mormon, and whether or not he lost his belief in the church's foundational text and self-described "keystone" of the religion.² While much has been said and speculated about the papers in retrospect, there has been very little focus on how anyone other than Roberts may have processed the information.

The fact that meetings discussing his papers were held in January 1922 with all of the top leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is rarely disclosed, and the fact that Roberts held meetings with anyone outside of church leadership had not been discovered or discussed. It can now be shown that in addition to the meetings with church leadership, a series of meetings were held in the private home of James and Alice Moyle in April, May, and June of 1922. Those in attendance were the most highly educated and faithful Mormons in Utah with special scientific and intellectual expertise. A close examination of this select group

¹ While use of the term "Mormon" has recently been discouraged by church officials, this paper will freely use that term. Not only is it much less cumbersome than "member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," it is in keeping with the normal usage and context of the historical period discussed in this paper.

² Introduction page of Book of Mormon. LDS Church President Ezra Taft Benson noted, "Just as the arch crumbles if the keystone is removed, so does all the Church stand or fall with the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon." (Conference Report, Oct. 1986). The Book of Mormon is believed by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church or Mormons) to be a history written on gold plates by ancient inhabitants of the Americas, buried in a hill in present-day New York in 400 A.D., found by Joseph Smith in 1827, and translated by the "gift and power of God" into the Book of Mormon.

of Mormon intelligentsia sheds light on the entire episode and gives context to the intellectual atmosphere of Mormonism in the 1920s and beyond.

These meetings demonstrate that the issues were not laid to rest in 1922 at the end of a personal project. Instead, they were known by dozens of people and continued to operate in the background of Mormon intellectual life until the papers surfaced in the 1980s for another round of examination. That fact that this topic would remain so disruptive sixty years after it was initially presented only underscores its importance. B. H. Roberts and others were similarly concerned earlier, but that information was carefully guarded by all those who were present at the meetings. Far from being a benign topic of interest, the ideas contained in his papers were considered explosive and potentially dangerous to the faith.

As historian Amanda Porterfield observed: “Doubt about God...could be guarded against and even denied, but not extinguished; efforts expended against doubt reflected its feared strength.”³ The meetings were an effort to keep such doubts at bay and to produce answers. Then, when no ready answers were found that would not require a rethinking of the entire faith, efforts were made to keep such information from the public eye and shore up the weak spots without fully acknowledging them. It is such efforts expended against doubt—the struggle to find ways to make it less problematic as well as the hiding and denial of information—that reveals its feared strength.

³ Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 206.

The Documents: B. H. Roberts's Studies

B. H. Roberts's Book of Mormon studies, written in 1921-1922, used scientific discovery and literary analysis to examine problems relating to the authenticity and historicity of the Book of Mormon. At least some of Roberts's papers were presented to select groups of people in 1922, and almost all were kept private until they were discovered and published in 1985. The controversial papers consisted of three main documents. The first, "Book of Mormon Difficulties. A Study," consisted of 141 typewritten pages and discussed issues relating to scientific (external) difficulties. External issues included the unfeasibility of the proliferation of Native American languages from a single (Hebrew) source in too short of a time;⁴ a lack of archaeological proof to support anachronisms such as horses and other domestic plants and animals, chariots, steel, and silk (unknown in the Americas prior to European contact but mentioned in the Book of Mormon); and archaeological evidence that conflicted with the Book of Mormon narrative (such as evidence that people migrated from Asia and populations were more ancient and less Christian than the Book of Mormon allows).

This document was presented to church officials in January 1922, as evidenced by journal entries and letters by those in attendance.⁵ These meetings did not result in the answers or attention Roberts was hoping for.⁶ His disappointment in the results of these meetings led to a second series of meetings, held in the home of James Moyle. In these meetings, a now-identified group of highly educated Mormons discussed the issues raised by Roberts's "Book of Mormon Difficulties" study. Roberts's continued investigations resulted in a

⁴ Since 400 A.D., according to the Book of Mormon timeline.

⁵ See Appendix B for all known journal entries relating to these meetings.

⁶ See "Leadership Meetings" chapter of this paper for discussion of these meetings.

second document, “A Book of Mormon Study.” It is unknown whether the assembled intellectuals were aware of or helped with the creation of the second document; Roberts was writing it during the period of the Moyle meetings with the intelligentsia, subsequent to his “disappointing” meetings with the leadership.

The second document was 284 typewritten pages dealing with internal difficulties and literary criticism. This document examined the likelihood that Joseph Smith was actually the author of the foundational text rather than the translator of an ancient record written by ancient Americans on gold plates, as Smith claimed. In addition to considering Smith’s active imagination and interest in ancient Americans, Roberts cited possible source material such as the Bible and *A View of the Hebrews*, a popular and widely distributed book published in a county adjacent to Smith’s in 1823 (seven years before the Book of Mormon was published). In this second document, Roberts criticized the Book of Mormon stories as being overly miraculous and the characters as archetypal and overly simplistic. He questioned:

Do we have here a great historical document, or only a wonder tale, told by an undeveloped mind, living in a period and in an environment where the miraculous in “history” is accepted without limitations and is supposed to account for all inconsistencies and lapses that challenge human credulity in the thought and in the easy philosophy *that all things are possible with God?*⁷

The record is mixed on whether or not a copy of this document was presented to the church authorities, and it is unlikely that he presented the material orally.⁸

⁷ B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham H. Madsen. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 258. Emphasis in original.

⁸ See chapters on “Leadership Meetings” and “The Next Generation” for discussion of the second study and the admissions and denials of it being in church possession.

Related to the second document was a third one called “A Parallel.” It was created by Roberts in 1927 as a way to summarize a portion of the second paper as he wrestled with whether or not to present his second study to church officials. It was eighteen typed pages showing the uncanny similarities between The Book of Mormon and *A View of the Hebrews*. A few of the mentioned similarities include the migration of a group of Jewish people from Jerusalem to the uninhabited American continent by boat, a single common (Hebrew) linguistic and ancestral origin for all Native Americans, a division of those people into civilized and uncivilized groups, inspired prophets teaching a monotheistic religion, wars between the two groups resulting in the total annihilation of the civilized portion, and a buried book telling their history written in a form of Egyptian hieroglyphics.⁹ This third document was known to have been given to at least one apostle (Richard R. Lyman), and it was copied and surreptitiously passed around intellectual circles between 1927 and 1985, when the B. H. Roberts papers were published in their entirety.¹⁰

Through the years, there were whispers of the documents’ information. Pieces of B. H. Roberts’s study circulated among students, with readers being told to destroy them and to “keep their mouth shut.”¹¹ As one grandson of a general authority recalled, there were rumors of a book written by Roberts “that, if it’s ever published, will just blow things sky high.”¹² But

⁹ See Roberts, *Studies*, 323-344.

¹⁰ For more information on intellectuals passing around “A Parallel,” see chapter about “The Next Generation.” See also Truman Madsen, “B. H. Roberts after Fifty Years” *Ensign*, December 1983, p. 23, fn 28; Madison U. Sowell, “Defending the Keystone: The Comparative Method Reexamined,” *Sunstone Magazine* Vol. 6 (May-June 1981); and A.C. Lambert to Rev. Wesley P. Walters, December 14, 1978, Everett Cooley Papers, University of Utah Marriott Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹¹ A.C. Lambert to Rev. Wesley P. Walters, December 14, 1978. Everett Cooley Papers, University of Utah.

¹² Sterling McMurrin and Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 21.

Roberts's findings stayed in the realm of rumor for fifty years, and apparently, most people complied with the order to keep quiet about it. Yet, those rumors insured that the dangerous secret retained its power. The three documents found new life in the 1970s, when the somewhat disillusioned son of one of the apostles who had attended the meetings went searching and found the papers, which the Roberts family eventually allowed to be published. That background—the meetings, who knew, who kept quiet, who privately struggled with the knowledge of what Roberts had written, and who kept those rumors alive—has never been examined and is the subject of this thesis.

Understanding Church Leadership

A major factor in the power of the papers was that B. H. Roberts was an insider at the top levels of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, not a critic. These papers were not created to destroy the church, but to prevent its destruction—to be prepared for any argument that could threaten truth claims. But they also showed how tenuous and problematic the truth claims were, undermining the entire movement. Because of Roberts's authority, he was both the church's most able defender and its most dangerous critic. When his papers resurfaced, it was vitally important to the church to keep him from being cast as a critic. Instead he was characterized as a lawyer who prepared a "devil's advocate" brief of an argument he personally rejected. Roberts's credibility made the documents dangerous if it could be proven that Roberts (or other church officials who encountered the information) had doubts about the Book of Mormon's historicity. The fact that other church officials were aware of the documents and

what they contained has been carefully guarded information as a way to protect and distance the organization from knowledge of his work.¹³

For over fifty years, from his appointment in 1888 to his death in 1933, B. H. Roberts was at the top of the Mormon hierarchy and their most outspoken advocate. His official position was that of one of the Seven Presidents of the Seventies whose responsibilities were to oversee missions and education. Because of changes in church leadership since Roberts' lifetime, that position no longer exists, and the Seventies, still considered general authorities, do not have the clout they did in Roberts' day. In the early twentieth century however, his position was nearly on par with that of an apostle. During his time, the top authorities would be the president/prophet, Heber J. Grant, and his two counselors in the First Presidency, Charles W. Penrose and Anthony Ivins. Next came the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and the Seven Presidents of the Seventies, consisting of twelve men and seven men, respectively.¹⁴ These twenty-two men would have been known and revered by members of the church and were the majority (and possibly totality, at that time) of the paid clergy in a church that prides itself on the volunteer efforts of an unpaid lay clergy.¹⁵

Furthermore, Roberts would have been considered to be "called of God" to this position. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or LDS Church), there is no professional clergy (meaning those who received specialized training such as seminary or divinity degrees and chose church service as a vocation). They move from volunteer to paid

¹³ See "The Next Generation" chapter and conclusion.

¹⁴ See Appendix A for a list of these men.

¹⁵ <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/topic/organizational-structure-of-the-church> (accessed October 10, 2019).

positions by moving up the ranks, first showing their faithfulness and ability in unpaid local positions before being called “by those who are in authority,” meaning those who are higher up in the hierarchy, to positions of greater authority. This does not conflict with Mormon belief that being paid to serve constitutes “priestcraft” and corrupts people from the virtues of doing good for the sake of making money, because their original intent was never to make money. Any compensation is simply to cover living expenses while they attend to the matters of church leadership. In other words, while working for the church was Roberts’s job, it was also a calling from God, earned by his faithfulness and worthiness.

When “The Brethren,” or the ruling church hierarchy, were called as general authorities, they quit their previous jobs. Their new priority became the church. For apostles especially, this was a grave responsibility, one that was believed to put them in possession of all the same power and priesthood that Jesus himself possessed. According to Brigham Young, the office of Apostle of Jesus Christ “puts him in possession of every key, every power, every authority, communication, benefit, blessing, glory and kingdom that was ever revealed to man.”¹⁶ Besides having all the powers and blessings known to man, it was these men’s sacred duty to be “special” witnesses of Jesus Christ.

While all members of the church are expected to be witnesses of Jesus Christ, an apostle is a “special witness” of Christ, as scripture mandated. When Joseph Smith selected the first set of apostles, he wrote a revelation that defined their role: “The twelve traveling councilors are called to be the Twelve Apostles, or special witnesses of the name of Christ in all the world—

¹⁶ Journal of Discourses, 9:87.

thus differing from other officers in the church in the duties of their calling.”¹⁷ Often, people interchange the terms “Apostle” and “Special Witness for Christ” the same way they will interchange “Prophet, Seer, and Revelator” with “President of the Church.” In fact, many members believe that part of the ordination to apostleship includes meeting with the resurrected Christ in order to obtain that “special” part of the witness.¹⁸

John A. Widtsoe, an apostle during this time (1921-1952), confirmed belief in both of these aspects of apostleship as he reported in his memoir: “The apostleship permitted the holders to perform any and every authorized service within the church. Members of the Quorum of Twelve and their associates were charged, in addition, with the responsibility of bearing witness to the truth of the glad latter-day message to all the world...”¹⁹ One other charge not mentioned in this passage but equally important was to present a united front. This was also mandated by scripture, that the quorums must have a “unanimous voice” about any decision they make.²⁰

For general authorities, upholding the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was to be their top priority. When science and religion conflicted, many believed that religion should prevail rather than cede any ground. This was illustrated by a letter written in 1934 from an apostle to a scientist during the debates surrounding evolution in the early 1930s, an incident which also involved B. H. Roberts (who, as a Seventy rather than an Apostle, was not under the mandate of unanimity). In this letter, the apostle (Joseph Fielding Smith) explained to the

¹⁷ Doctrine and Covenants, 107:23

¹⁸ To this day, Church leadership is careful neither to confirm nor deny that they’ve seen Christ face to face. They say the matter it is too sacred to talk about, or that whether they’ve seen Christ is not important because their certainty of His existence would not change either way.

¹⁹ John A. Widtsoe, *In a Sunlit Land*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1952), 160.

²⁰ Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) 107:27.

scientist (Sterling Talmage, son of Smith's fellow apostle James Talmage) his reasons for holding firm to the literal reading of the Bible rather than adjusting his beliefs to the findings of science:

I have not felt that I am under any obligation to accept the theories which are based on scientific research, but have the divine right to question them. I am, however, under obligation to accept revealed truth which comes through the opening of the heavens from the One who "comprehendeth all things," and when I find what I believe to be a conflict between the theories of men and the word of the Lord, I am bold to say that I accept the latter with full confidence that the [scientific] theories must be changed.²¹

For this apostle, the primary concern of church hierarchy, especially at the top level, was to defend the church/faith at all costs, no matter what science said. It was a job taken very seriously by the general authorities, their mandate from God.

B. H. Roberts was the church's top scholar and defender when it came to the Book of Mormon and remains one of Mormonism's top intellectuals.²² Roberts had several opportunities to come to the church's defense during his lifetime. In 1907, despite accounts that Joseph Smith received the text of the Book of Mormon word-by-word directly from God, Roberts convinced the Brethren—by creating a more flexible definition of the concept of translation—to correct many of the grammatical issues of the Book of Mormon.²³ He maintained that Joseph Smith had been inspired but had sometimes used his own vocabulary as

²¹ Joseph Fielding Smith to Sterling B. Talmage, September 29, 1934. Sterling B. Talmage Papers, Marriott Library.

²² Hal Boyd, "Top 10 LDS 'Intellectuals'" *Deseret News*, June 10, 2011.

<https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:sdTF4eHZASkJ:https://www.deseretnews.com/top/168/0/Top-10-LDS-6Intellectuals7.html+&cd=11&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us&client=firefox-b-1-d> (Accessed October 20, 2019)

²³ David Whitmer, "An Address to All Believers in Christ," Richmond, Mo.: n.p., 1887, p. 12; see also Russell M. Nelson, "A Treasured Testament," *Ensign*, July 1993. Though some of the folksy phrases in the first edition of the Book of Mormon (1830) such as "I was a going thither," "in them days," and "they done all these things" were corrected in the 1837 edition, several grammatical issues remained. For a discussion of these changes, see Stan Larson, "Textual Variants in the Book of Mormon Manuscript", *Dialogue*, v 10 n 4:

https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V10N04_10.pdf

part of the translation process.²⁴ His 1909 book series, *New Witnesses for God*, dealt specifically with internal and external evidences of the Book of Mormon's authenticity in response to critics, even addressing some of the issues that he would examine more closely in his *Studies*, admittedly finding them to be more problematic than he had originally thought.

When the *New York Times* published an article in 1912 showing that the Egyptian scrolls Joseph Smith had claimed to translate were an ordinary funerary text rather than a text written by the ancient biblical patriarch Abraham, Roberts published a defense that soothed readers and urged them to refrain from making a judgement until the originals could be studied.²⁵ Before the *Studies* controversy, Roberts was probably best known for writing what remains the only major history of the church, six volumes entitled *Comprehensive History of the Church*. It was published in 1930 but had been written in a series of installments for *Americana* magazine between July 1909 and July 1915.²⁶

In his apologetic work, *New Witnesses for God*, Roberts stood firm on the Book of Mormon claims of authenticity. He was confident that the Book of Mormon was what it claimed to be and understood that critics had good reasons to be tough:

If the origin of the Book of Mormon could be proved to be other than that set forth by Joseph Smith; if the book itself could be proved to be other than it claims to be...then the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and its message and doctrines...must fall; for if that book is other than it claims to be; if its origin is other than that ascribed to it by Joseph Smith, then Joseph Smith says that which is untrue; he is a false prophet of false prophets; and all he taught and all his claims to inspiration and divine authority,

²⁴ The Leonard Arrington collection at Utah State University has the copy of a submission letter dated July 25, 1907 for proposing grammatical changes, with Roberts promising to destroy his original work, lest it fall into the hands of enemies.

²⁵ The argument was based on modern translations of the hand drawn copies of the original scrolls, which had been presumed to be destroyed in the great Chicago fire in 1871. The originals were found in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1967 and still did not match Smith's translation.

²⁶ Roberts, B. H., "Preface", *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, Century I, (Salt Lake City: LDS Church, 1930), Preface.

are not only vain but wicked; and all that he did as a religious teacher is not only useless, but mischievous beyond human comprehending.

...Those who accept the Book of Mormon for what it claims to be, may not so state their case that its security chiefly rests on the inability of its opponents to prove a negative. The affirmative side of the question belongs to us who hold out the Book of Mormon to the world as a revelation of God. The burden of proof rests upon us in every discussion...for not only must the Book of Mormon not be proved to have other origin than that which we set forth, or be other than what we say it is, *but we must prove its origin to be what we say it is, and the book itself to be what we proclaim it to be—a revelation from God*...To be known, the truth must be stated and the clearer and more complete the statement is, the better opportunity will the Holy Spirit have for testifying to the souls of men that the work is true.²⁷

While he admitted that there were still unanswered questions after he had written his best defense, he expressed his hope that “a little more time, a little more research, a little more certain knowledge” would provide the missing links to a complete solution. Despite Roberts’s insistence that it was not enough to rest on a critic’s inability to prove a negative, that has ultimately been the position of the church.²⁸

The Environment of 1920s Mormonism

The meetings examined in this paper occurred during a pivotal time in the church’s development. The church Roberts joined at the age of nine after an arduous journey from England in 1866 was the first generation of believers, those who had known The Prophet (or knew others who had), had endured persecution for their beliefs, and had given up previous lives to be a part of Zion. Since arriving with Brigham Young in Utah in 1847, they had worked

²⁷ B.H. Roberts, *New Witness for God*, 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), iii-vii. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 237-48.

side-by-side to build the fledgling community in the territory from scratch. But such effort is hard to sustain. After trying for over fifty years to set up an independent communitarian Kingdom of God in the West, statehood in 1896 seemed to be a relief for many. In 1890, they had also given up their distinctive practice, polygamy. The distinctly Mormon identity was becoming less distinctive.

Most religious movements fail to survive after the first generation, and by 1922, Mormonism was in that critical stage where the first generation was gone and the tension that had sustained its sense of distinctiveness was dissipating. Sociologist Armand Mauss described this period of Mormon history as the “Americanization” period.²⁹ According to Mauss, deviant and unpopular groups (such as immigrants or new religious or political movements) undergo a cycle of resistance, accommodation, and assimilation as the host society tries to neutralize a threat to the normative order of society, much as an organism fights a virus.

Mormons had experienced (and practiced) resistance in Missouri and Illinois that had resulted in their move to the Utah wilderness and their struggle against the United States, becoming one of the most hated and controversial groups in America during the second half of the nineteenth century. After intense pressure, Mormons then made accommodations by giving up polygamy (in 1890 and 1904), postponing (for heaven) the idea of an ultimate theocracy, embracing statehood (1896), and seeking education at institutions outside of Utah (beginning in 1867).

²⁹ Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*, (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1994), x.

After making such accommodations, the turnaround from disrepute to respectability was “an astonishing success story...Few American subcultures have realized the American Dream as fully or as rapidly as have the Mormons,” according to Mauss.³⁰ He wrote that church policy was “conspicuously assimilationist” during the first half of the twentieth century (a trend they consciously tried to reverse in order to recapture their distinctiveness in the second half). Assimilation efforts focused on helping the outside world see how intelligent, industrious, and “normal” Mormons were, rather than the evil, backwards, murderous, licentious, and brainwashed people they had been in stereotypes.

Seeking approval, or at least understanding, from the outside world was an important feature of this time period. Another feature was a “demystification” process “that we would expect of a people increasingly engaged with the world,” according to Mauss.³¹ This would include a gradual cessation of some of the more mystical practices such as speaking in tongues and a willingness to see doctors rather than rely on priesthood blessings for healing. This would also include a willingness for Roberts and others to look critically at their sacred text.

Education was an important factor in this process, according to historian Thomas Simpson. “In comparison with other outsiders, Mormons enjoyed relative freedom in the American university to join the club and play the game—to cover the outward markers of ethnic outsider status and ‘pass’ as white (and even as monogamous).”³² As universities were traditionally founded by religious institutions for training clergy, only the most liberal

³⁰ Mauss, 22.

³¹ Mauss, 28.

³² Thomas W. Simpson, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism 1867-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 8.

institutions were willing to accept Mormons, and the secularization of many universities by the beginning of the twentieth century also worked in Mormons' favor. The university provided a setting where Mormons could rub shoulders with the outside world, and the outside world could meet the Mormons. Each found the other to be less threatening than they had feared. Mormons quickly distinguished themselves in academic settings.

Those who had been educated "abroad" between the death of Brigham Young in 1877 and Utah's statehood in 1896 did so at the height of hostilities between Mormons and the rest of America and played a critical role in the community's reintegration into American life. Simpson described the unique environment American universities offered Mormon students in contrast to the other areas of contact that were more adversarial such as the halls of Congress, missionary efforts, and business:

American universities offered a rising, influential generation of Mormons a rare, revivifying freedom from Gentile aggression and ecclesiastical oversight. A realm of genuine hospitality, dignity, and freedom, the American university became a liminal, quasi-sacred space where nineteenth-century Mormons could undergo a radical transformation of consciousness and identity. As a result, they developed an enduring devotion to non-Mormons' institutions, deference to non-Mormons' expertise, and respect for non-Mormons' wisdom. These extra-ecclesiastical loyalties would dismantle the ideological framework of Mormon separatism and pave the way for Mormons' voluntary reimmersion into the mainstream of American life.³³

The smooth change from utopian separatism to "monogamy, market capitalism, public schools, national political parties, and military service" demonstrated that the people were ready for such rapid change.³⁴ This was in large part because during those most tense times, Mormon

³³ Simpson, 28.

³⁴ Ibid.

students were laying groundwork for acceptance on both sides. When they returned from “abroad” they were able to exert influence at home.

The intellectuals involved in the Moyle meetings played an important part in creating bridges during the period between resistance and accommodation while moving toward assimilation. In 1922 they were again tasked with building bridges, this time between their understanding of the faith and the science that seemed to contradict it.

Leadership Meetings

The known facts about the creation of the documents and the two series of meetings can be found in the introduction to *Studies of the Book of Mormon* published by University of Illinois Press in 1985. The introduction by editor Brigham Madsen described B. H. Roberts as a dedicated scholar who was willing to examine the issues. He was industrious and tenacious in his fact-finding: “he could be abrasive in his independence, despised the maxim ‘thus far shalt thou come, but no farther’ and denounced the ‘simple faith’ which could lead to belief without understanding or to ‘ignorant and simpering acquiescence.’”³⁵ Roberts wanted people to have a strong, robust faith that could bear investigation and questioning and could satisfy both spiritual and intellectual yearnings.

According to Madsen, Roberts knew that some people were nervous about looking too closely at valued truths and wrote “some would protest against investigation lest it threaten the integrity of the accepted formulas of truth—which too often they confound with the truth

³⁵ Subsequent reprints were made with Signature Books. B. H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham H. Madsen. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 22.

itself, regarding the scaffolding and the building as one and the same thing.”³⁶ Roberts felt that truth was one thing, and human understanding of it another. Truth was constant, but the scaffolding surrounding it could change without harming the integrity of the truth. Significantly, he believed there was no harm in gaining greater understanding.

Though Roberts had earlier written a defense of the Book of Mormon in his 1909 work, *New Witnesses for God*, Madsen wrote that Roberts then spent the next several years focused on writing the history of the church for *Americana Magazine*. He returned to examining the origins of the Book of Mormon when he received a letter from a young Mormon named William E. Riter, who was looking for help in answering the five questions of a non-member friend. Riter conveyed the inquiries of Mr. Couch of Washington, D.C., with whom Riter had been discussing his faith.

The letter had originally been written on August 22, 1921 to Apostle James E. Talmage, who then passed to it Roberts for assistance in composing an answer. Couch’s questions were specific:³⁷

1. How could the great diversity in primitive Indian languages have occurred in such a short period after about A.D. 400, when the Nephites, whose Hebrew language was so highly developed, disappeared?
2. The Book of Mormon reports that the followers of Lehi, upon their arrival in the New World, found horses, which were not in existence when the first Spanish explorers arrived.
3. Although the Jews had no knowledge of steel in 600 B.C., Nephi was reported to have had a bow of steel after he left Jerusalem.

³⁶ Brigham Madsen, “Introduction” in Roberts, *Studies*, 20.

³⁷ For clarity: Lehi and his family, including sons named Nephi and Laman, left Jerusalem in 600 B.C. After traveling to the Americas by boat, Lehi’s descendants separated into the religious Christian good guys, the Nephites, and the savage warrior bad guys, the Lamanites. The Nephites were destroyed by the Lamanites in 400 A.D. (after burying the gold plates containing their history), and the Lamanites are the ancestors of present-day Native Americans. Since Joseph Smith’s time, the term “Lamanite” had been synonymous with “Indian.”

4. The Book of Mormon speaks of ‘swords and scimeters,” and yet the word “scimitar” does not appear in early literature before the rise of Mohammedanism, which took place after Lehi departed from Jerusalem.
5. Even though silk was not known in America, the Nephites knew of and used silk.³⁸

Mr. Riter was apparently quite persistent in getting an answer. His first letter was written in late August. This was likely ignored (or at least unaddressed) until he wrote another letter to Talmage, probably in late October. This follow-up letter seems to be the one that actually spurred Talmage and others to action. By early November, Talmage had asked Roberts to craft a reply and had responded to Riter that Roberts would be handling the matter. On October 28 apostle Richard Lyman wrote a letter to his friend and Harvard biologist Ralph V. Chamberlain, as well as at least one other friend, physician George W. Middleton (both Mormon) asking for help.³⁹ Riter then wrote a third letter on December 20, asking Roberts when he could expect an answer. Roberts replied to Riter on December 28, saying he had been working on the issue for several weeks but needed more time.⁴⁰

The next day, December 29, 1921, Roberts wrote a letter to church president Heber J. Grant. This letter explained that he was happy for the assignment because while his previous treatment of the Book of Mormon problems in *New Witnesses for God* had “not been altogether as convincing as I would like to have seen them, I still believed that reasonable explanations could be made that would keep us in advantageous possession of the field.” However, as he proceeded with his investigations, he “found the difficulties more serious than I

³⁸ Madsen, “Introduction” in Roberts, *Studies*, 21.

³⁹ See Roberts, *Studies*, 45-60 for copies of these letters, excepting the late-October Riter one.

⁴⁰ See Roberts, *Studies* for the letters, pp. 35-60. originals in the B. H. Roberts Papers at Marriott Library, University of Utah.

had thought,” and “the more I investigated, the more difficult I found the formulation of an answer to Mr. Couch’s inquiries to be.” As he researched, expanding on the questions, Roberts decided he should not answer without the input of others.

He asked if he could present his findings, a 141-page document, to the First Presidency, Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and the First Council of the Seventy. He hoped that their “collective wisdom” or “the inspiration of the Lord” would help them find a solution that would “maintain the reasonableness for the faith of all in the Nephite scriptures.” He was:

most thoroughly convinced of the necessity of all the brethren herein addressed becoming familiar with these Book of Mormon problems, and finding an answer for them, as it is a matter that will concern the faith of the Youth of the Church now as also in the future, as well as such casual inquirers as may come to us from the outside world.⁴¹

Roberts was granted his requested meeting; a measure of how serious church leaders considered the matter to be.

On January 4 and 5, 1922, Roberts spent two full days presenting his information to the General Authorities (about twenty people).⁴² The sessions lasted from 10 A.M. until 6 P.M. the first day and from 10 A.M. to nearly 8 P.M. on the second. According to Madsen, this timeline was confirmed by George Richard’s diary (closed to research), and James Talmage’s journal.⁴³

Talmage’s journal gave the most detailed description of the leadership meetings:

Jan. 4, Wed: Attended forenoon and afternoon sessions of a meeting of the First Presidency, the Twelve, and the First Council of Seventies, listening to a lengthy but valuable report by Elder B. H. Roberts, relating to his Book of Mormon study. Brother Roberts has assembled a long list of points called “difficulties”, meaning thereby what non-believers in the Book of Mormon call discrepancies between that record and the

⁴¹ Roberts, *Studies*, 46-47.

⁴² See Appendix A for a list of attendees.

⁴³ Heber J. Grant, Richard R. Lyman, George Albert Smith, and Seymour Young also had journal entries referring to the leadership meetings. See Appendix B.

results of archeological and other scientific investigations. As examples of these “difficulties” may be mentioned the views put forth by some living writers to the effect that no vestige of either Hebrew or Egyptian appears in the language of the American Indians, or Amerinds. Another is the positive declaration by certain writers that the horse did not exist upon the Western Continent during historic times prior to the coming of Columbus.

After recording the contents of the meeting, Talmage uncharacteristically then recorded his feelings about what he heard:

I know the Book of Mormon to be a true record; and many of the “difficulties”, or objections as critics would urge, are after all but negative in their nature. The Book of Mormon states that Lehi and his colony found horses upon this continent when they arrived; and therefore horses were here at that time.⁴⁴

Talmage clearly felt the need to reassure himself that his beliefs were still solid after the meetings, rejecting the significance of the information that Roberts had presented. The next day, Talmage merely noted that Roberts continued his presentation.

The meetings were a great disappointment to Roberts, and he sent Grant a letter on January 9 to express his feelings about the outcome of the meetings. This letter spurred Grant to convene another full day of meetings to discuss the subject on January 26. These three meetings are the only known meetings where Roberts presented his findings to all of the General Authorities.

Madsen then mentioned what he assumed to be follow-up committee meetings: “on three other occasions extending from February 2 to May 25, 1922, Roberts met in some evening sessions in a private home with Grant’s councilor, Anthony W. Ivins, and with Apostles Talmage and John A. Widtsoe to ‘consider external evidences of the genuineness of the Book of

⁴⁴ James E. Talmage Journal. January 4, 1922.

Mormon' and to approve a letter of reply to Couch."⁴⁵ This assumption was based on Talmage's journal entry for February 2, where he wrote of an evening committee meeting consisting of the above-mentioned members to approve of a reply to Couch's letter, as well as a later letter from Roberts to Grant naming the same as members of a committee.⁴⁶ The other dates, April 28 and May 25, were also evening meetings. Talmage wrote that they were held at the Moyle home, but did not list attendees, leading Madsen to conclude that they were all the same group. In fact, new research shows that only the meeting on February 2 was a committee meeting of the above-named members. The other meetings (including an additional one on June 25) were much more significant than small committee meetings. They were the newly discovered intelligentsia meetings held at the Moyle home.⁴⁷

In the spring of 1922, shortly after the leadership meetings, Roberts was called to serve as the President of the Eastern States Mission headquartered in New York City. He left Utah on May 29, 1922 and served in New York until May 1927. Roberts wrote in his autobiography that part of the allure of serving as the mission president in New York was that "it had the attraction of including within it the territory of the early activities of the Church—Vermont—the birthplace of the Prophet; New York—the early scenes of the Prophet's life, the first vision and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, the Hill Cumorah; ...which naturally would endear this section of the country to the mind and heart of Elder Roberts."⁴⁸ Roberts clearly had a desire to become better acquainted with the birthplace of Mormonism; and the second study, which

⁴⁵ Roberts, *Studies*, 22.

⁴⁶ Roberts to Grant, March 15, 1923, in *Studies*, 57.

⁴⁷ See Moyle Meetings chapter of this paper.

⁴⁸ From Roberts, "Life Story," 217. Quoted in Roberts, *Studies*, 24

focused on the conditions surrounding Joseph Smith at the time the Book of Mormon was translated or created, was undoubtedly on his mind.

While some sources contained in the study were added after a visit to the New York Public Library on June 7, 1922, the second study seems to have been completed before leaving for his mission. His visit to the library to check his sources as well as a few minor edits showed that he worked on his study, at least briefly, while serving as mission president. Madsen contended that issues discussed in the papers were a matter of concern through the rest of Roberts's life and fundamentally changed his beliefs. Roberts never publicly denounced Book of Mormon historicity and continued to affirm divine truths contained within the book, though it appeared that he de-emphasized the historical aspects of it.⁴⁹

Whether or not Roberts's second study was ever presented to church officials is a matter of debate. While Roberts almost certainly did not present his material orally to the general authorities as he had with the first study, it is possible that the material was at least given to the First Presidency. Church sources argue that Roberts completed the study before his mission as part of a committee assignment rather out of personal interest or concern, that he never showed his findings to church leadership, that he "basically put it behind him" when he left on his mission except for revisiting them "only briefly" in 1927 when he wrote "A Parallel," and that only one apostle had been shown the parallels document.⁵⁰ However, several letters

⁴⁹ Though he did not denounce the book, one example of his wavering commitment to its historicity was a 1924 radio address in his papers entitled "A New Outlook on Mormonism." He called the Book of Mormon an "alleged volume of sacred, American History and Revelation" and quoted the scripture "Adam fell that men might be...." as "one of the Mormon Prophet's noblest utterances." In Mormon belief, it was Lehi, not Joseph Smith, that wrote such a line; most Mormons would not credit any of the Book of Mormon's words to Joseph Smith.

⁵⁰ John W. Welch and Truman G. Madsen, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?" (FARMS Preliminary Report 1985, P. O. Box 7113 University Station, Provo, UT 84602.), 2. See also John W. Welch, "B. H.

would indicate that Roberts had returned to the topic over the years, that he had not “basically put it behind him” in 1922, and that the papers may have been submitted to church leaders.

In the 1927 letter to apostle Richard Lyman containing “A Parallel,” it was clear that Roberts had not put the matter behind him. Roberts reminded Lyman that at the conclusion of the 1922 leadership meetings he had announced that there were other problems besides the ones they had spoken of in the meetings. Lyman had then asked: “Well, will these help solve our present problems or will it increase our difficulties?” Roberts replied, “It would very greatly increase our problems.” At which Lyman “rather lightly” said, “Well, I don’t see why we should bother with them then.”⁵¹ Roberts responded that he would continue his studies anyway.

The nonchalant reply given by Lyman in 1922 evidently bothered Roberts greatly. He mentioned it in the submission letter for the second study within months of the event; in this letter to Lyman, five years later; then again to his friend Wesley Lloyd, twelve years after it happened. Roberts, who felt that the Brethren should be prepared for any argument, could not believe that some of the men would want to hide from lurking problems and not prepare for an attack. Though it seems that most (if not all) of the men were in agreement with Lyman and avoided deep examination of the issues, Lyman was the one who had expressed the sentiment aloud. Yet, it was Lyman who attended the leadership meetings as well as the Moyle meetings, wrote letters to his friends in search of answers for Riter’s letter, and brought the subject up again with Roberts five year later in 1927. Of anyone in church leadership, it appears that

Roberts: Seeker After Truth”, *Ensign*, March 1986 and Truman Madsen, “B. H. Roberts after 50 Years,” *Ensign*, December 1983.

⁵¹ Roberts, *Studies*, 58-60. Citing B. H. Roberts to Richard Lyman, October 24, 1927.

Lyman had actually been the most willing to seek answers but like the others, had no answers to give.

As he presented “A Parallel,” Roberts told Lyman that he had indeed continued his investigations and had come upon “a possible theory of the Origin of the Book of Mormon that is quite unique” and could be “very embarrassing” if presented by a “skillful opponent.”⁵² Roberts told Lyman that he had “drawn up a somewhat lengthy report” as well as a letter of submission before leaving for his mission in 1922, but “in the hurry of getting away and the impossibility at that time of having my report considered, I dropped the matter, and have not yet decided whether I shall present that report to the First Presidency or not.” It seems that Roberts could tell that the general authorities were not ready to listen to more of this information before his mission, and was aware of the fact that the mission call may have been a way to interrupt his studies, redirect his attention, and remove him from sight. Five years later, he was still wrestling with whether or not to present his second paper to church officials and hoped that Lyman would offer clarity or assistance.

He explained to Lyman that if the question arose as to whether or not Joseph Smith used *View of the Hebrews* to provide the structure and some of the material to the “Alleged Nephite Record,” it would:

...be greatly to the advantage of our future Defenders of the Faith, if they had in hand a thorough digest of the subject matter. I submit it to you and if you are sufficiently interested you may submit it to others of your Council. Let me say also, that the Parallel that I send you is not one fourth part of what can be presented in this form, and the unrepresented part is quite as striking as this that I submit.⁵³

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Roberts to Lyman, October 24, 1927, quoted in *Studies*, 58-60.

The term “Defenders of the Faith” (as well the capitalization) showed how Roberts’ understood the importance of his common mission with Lyman. Their job, along with everyone else in their quorums, was to shore up weakness and be ready for battle, if necessary. In this letter, Roberts seemed to be relieved to have someone to discuss the subject with who might be willing to again raise what he saw as a crucial question and share the burden of preparing a defense.

However, one can also sense that Roberts knew this information that he felt was vital, was also unwelcome. The first meetings had not produced results (or even the proper amount of concern) and had probably gotten him sent away. The material in his second study “greatly increased” the problems and would probably be even more poorly received. He likely hoped that showing Lyman the parallels between the two documents would help Lyman see the urgent need to address the issues and that Lyman would then assist in getting the information to authorities; and that Lyman’s doing so could take some of the pressure from Roberts.

The 1927 letter to Lyman makes it clear that the second study had not been presented to church authorities at that point, and he hoped that Lyman would assist him in turning attention to the issue. Two later exchanges seem to indicate that the second study may have been submitted, probably around the time he wrote to Lyman. This 1927 letter to Lyman with the inclusion of “A Parallel” was likely part of what he described later as a “feeble attempt” to get his study before the Brethren and the point when he may have sent the second study to President Grant.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Knowing Robert’s concern about being prepared for attacks, it seems unlikely that he would not have at least given a copy to church leaders so that someday, if and when they were ready and/or the topic came up, they could benefit from his notes and preparation, even if they were not yet prepared to read it at that time.

A 1932 letter written by Roberts to his secretary is valuable for church apologists in proving that Roberts had not intended his papers to be published, but it is not without problems for proving a theory that he was unconcerned by his findings and had not made church leaders aware of his second work. While unclear, the 1932 letter could indicate that he did submit the work to President Grant but had not presented it to the group. He wrote of the papers: “I suspended the submission of it until I returned home [1927], but I have not yet succeeded in making the presentation of it, although a letter of submission was made previous to leaving the E. S. M. [Eastern States Mission].” It also showed that ten years later, he was still thinking about his studies and disappointed in the church’s ability to deal with the information: “I have made one feeble effort to get it before them since returning home, but they are not in a studious mood.”⁵⁵ Roberts was clearly disappointed in the lack of interest his work had generated among the brethren and that his attempts to show them the information had been unanswered. It seems Roberts did not get the chance to revisit the subject with anyone else in leadership in any substantial way.

One final source in reference to the studies, as well as the leadership meetings, came eleven years after the meetings, just weeks before Roberts’s death in 1933. Wesley P. Lloyd, a friend who was formerly dean of the Graduate School at Brigham Young University and also a missionary under Roberts in the Eastern States Mission, wrote in his journal on August 7, 1933 that he had spent three and a half hours talking to Roberts: “The conversation then drifted to the Book of Mormon and this surprising story he related to me.”⁵⁶ Lloyd recorded that Roberts

⁵⁵ Truman Madsen, “B. H. Roberts after 50 Years,” *Ensign*, December 1983, 7.

⁵⁶ Wesley P. Lloyd Journal, August 7, 1933. Wesley P. Lloyd Papers, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU Provo. He had originally written the word “revolutionary” before crossing it out and substituting it with the word “surprising.”

told him of Riter's letter and of his assignment to answer it; how he had been "stumped" and asked for help from the Brethren. Roberts had then presented his findings to the General Authorities, only to be disappointed:

In answer, they merely one by one stood up and bore testimony to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. George Albert Smith in tears testified that his faith in the Book had not been shaken by the question. Pres Ivins, the man most likely to be able to answer a question on that subject was unable to produce the solution. No answer was available.⁵⁷

Roberts told Lloyd that while he could not blame the Brethren for their lack of answers, he said that in a church "which claimed continuous revelation, a crisis had occurred where revelation was necessary." Revelation was not given, despite the crisis and the claimed ability to receive it.

At the conclusion of the meetings:

It was mentioned at the meeting by Bro Roberts that there were other book of Mormon problems that needed special attention. Richard R. Lyman spoke up and asked if they were things that would help our prestige and when Bro. Roberts answered no, he said then why discuss them. This attitude was too much for the historically minded Roberts.⁵⁸

Roberts told Lloyd that "there was however a committee appointed to study this problem, consisting of Bros. Talmage, Ballard, Roberts, and one other apostle,"⁵⁹ but again Roberts was disappointed. They "met and looked vacantly at one another, but none seemed to know what to do about it." Finally, Roberts said he had attempted an answer, but it was one "that would satisfy people that didn't think, but a very inadequate answer to a thinking man." They decided it was "about the best they could do," and voted to adopt it.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ibid. Richard R. Lyman's journal noted the initials and the amount of time each person spoke on the last day of meetings, each for a minute or two, confirming this scenario though it provides no content.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Lloyd was mistaken on this detail, journals confirm that Ballard was not part of the committee, while Ivins and Widtsoe were. Talmage's journal on Feb 2 as well as the letter written to Mr. Riter confirm this meeting.

⁶⁰ Wesley P. Lloyd Journal, August 7, 1933. Quoted in *Studies*, 22-24.

The fact that the best reply they could come up with was one that would be an “inadequate answer to a thinking man” and Roberts’s disappointment with such a weak answer indicated his motivation to find thinkers to assist him with the issue. Roberts continued to struggle with a way to make Mormonism appealing to the intellectual group as he created his second study, though he did not mention the Moyle meetings with Lloyd:

After this Bro. Roberts made a special Book of Mormon study. Treated the problem systematically and historically and in a 400 type written page thesis set forth a revolutionary article on the origin of the Book of Mormon and sent it to Pres. Grant. It’s an article far too strong for the average Church member but for the intellectual group he considers it a contribution to assist in explaining Mormonism. He swings to a psychological explanation of the Book of Mormon and shows that the plates were not objective but subjective with Joseph Smith, that his exceptional imagination qualified him psychologically for the experience which he had in presenting to the world the Book of Mormon and that the plates with the Urim and Thummim were not objective. He then explained certain literary difficulties in the Book... These are some of the things which has made Bro. Roberts shift his base on the Book of Mormon. Instead of regarding it as the strongest evidence we have of Church Divinity, he regards it as the one which needs the most bolstering. His greatest claim for the divinity of the Prophet Joseph lies in the Doctrine and Covenants.⁶¹

Lloyd’s journal entry confirmed many of the details that would only be known by Roberts.

Written at the time of their conversation, it gave many new details such as the reactions of those in the leadership meetings. It said the second study had been submitted to President Grant and indicated that Roberts wanted intellectuals to have access to it. It also confirmed that Roberts did not believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon, but that he maintained belief in Joseph Smith as a divinely inspired prophet.

Lloyd’s shock at the story and the effort he made to write it down in as much detail as possible showed that this news was startling to him and would likely be so to other church members. His surprise also indicates why Roberts and the others involved may have felt

⁶¹ Roberts, *Studies*, 24.

reticent to discuss the issues publicly, as the “crisis” was by no means resolved and it felt “revolutionary” or “surprising” to those who heard about them, if Lloyd’s reaction to the information was any indication. Perhaps the shock of this event influenced Lloyd to attend the University of Chicago’s School of Divinity in the next year in search of answers of his own.⁶² Lloyd’s is the only known report (besides Talmage’s own personal reassurance) that gives insight to the feelings of church leaders in the face of this information as well as Roberts’s own feelings of frustration and helplessness at the end of his life.

The Moyle Meetings

Meetings assumed, in all historical accounts, to have been limited to a committee made up of Roberts and Apostles Ivins, Talmage, and Widtsoe can now be shown to have been quite different than historians previously assumed.⁶³ While there was a meeting on February 2, 1922 in which the above-named committee “met and looked vacantly at one another” before adopting Roberts’s proposed answer to Riter’s letter, Roberts had found their conclusions to be “inadequate” for intellectuals and sought input from people outside the committee. Several weeks later, Roberts participated in meetings with intellectuals, hoping to create better answers.

Because two of the participants’ journal entries included a list of attendees and Widtsoe was not included in any of them, it seems that this was not simply an expanded committee

⁶² See “Franklin Stewart Harris” chapter. See also: Russel B. Swensen, “Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School: A Personal Reminiscence,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol 7 no 2, 45.

⁶³ Named in March 15, 1923 letter from B. H. Roberts to Grant and the Talmage Feb. 2 diary entry approving the Riter reply.

meeting, but a separate meeting of carefully selected individuals with specific expertise. The fact that the meetings were held in the home of James H. Moyle, who was not part of church leadership, likely signaled to attendees that this was not ultimately a “church” meeting but an intellectual one.

Though Roberts did not mention the Moyle meetings in any of his extant letters, in his autobiography, or in his conversation with Lloyd, that does not mean they were unimportant, but could indicate an effort to keep others from being identified. The additional meetings demonstrated Roberts’s continued concern and his persistent search for answers. The list of participants included prominent Mormon intellectuals of the time, suggesting an expanded effort to explore the questions and find possible answers. These sessions perhaps even assisted Roberts as he completed his second study during those months, though that seems unlikely because he had to explain the contents of the second study years later in his letter to Lyman, who attended at least one of the meetings.

These were not inconsequential meetings, even though they were only known to meet a handful of times. The ties between most of the participants were weak, so this did not appear to be a social gathering. Several lived at a distance that was not easy to travel. Many had expertise in science and specialties in geology, archaeology, or speech would be particularly useful in discussing the external issues Roberts had written about in his first set of papers. These meetings seem designed to develop a better, more scientifically authoritative response than the leadership committee had finally concluded to use for Riter.

In his journal, James Talmage gave the only previously known details of these “private home” meetings that many had assumed was the leadership committee. On April 28, 1922 he wrote:

In the evening Wife and I attended a gathering at the home of Brother and Sister James H. Moyle, at which place were gathered a number of others, the purpose being to consider certain phases of study relating to the external evidences of the genuineness of the Book of Mormon. There was an interesting discussion, and tentative plans were made for other meetings.⁶⁴

He made another entry on May 25:

In the evening attended a small gathering at the home of Brother and Sister James H. Moyle, called for the further consideration of matters relating to the external evidences of the genuineness of the Book of Mormon. See entry for Friday April 28th.

Perhaps Talmage was purposely being specific about external evidences to indicate there was no discussion of internal issues (the subject of Roberts’s second paper), or perhaps he was simply being descriptive.

There are no available journal entries from the other known participants in the leadership committee (Ivins, Roberts, and Widtsoe). However, apostle Richard Lyman, though not a member of the committee, wrote a diary entry which showed that such meetings were not limited to the small committee that had been tasked with writing a reply to Mr. Riter. Lyman’s entry on May 25, 1922 read:

“8 p.m.- Attended a gathering at the home of James H. Moyle to discuss Book of Mormon Problems. Present- A.W. Ivins, James E. Talmage, B.H. Roberts and his wife Dr. Margaret, Dr. F.J. Pack, Prof. Russell of the U of U, Bro. Schrdall(?)- Amy B-“⁶⁵

⁶⁴ James Talmage Journal, April 28, 1922. James E. Talmage Papers, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

⁶⁵ Richard R. Lyman Journal, May 25, 1922. Richard R. Lyman Papers, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Adding to Ivins, Talmage, and Roberts (and subtracting Widtsoe), the group now expanded to include Margaret Shipp Roberts, M.D., physician and B. H. Roberts's third wife; James Henry Moyle, J.D., lawyer; Richard Roswell Lyman, Ph.D., engineer; and his wife, Amy Brown Lyman, who was a social worker and part of the Relief Society presidency;⁶⁶ geologist Dr. Frederick James Pack, Ph.D.; speech expert Professor George Oscar Russell (who held a Master's degree at this time but would go on to hold a Ph.D); and Bro. Schrdall- a misspelling for Janne Sjudahl, editor for church magazines and newspapers as well as Book of Mormon archaeology enthusiast.

Janne Sjudahl also made a journal entry, for a different date, naming several more people. It happened to be for the meeting on April 28, when Richard Lyman had been out of town:

Attended a meeting at the home of James Moyle, 411 East First South St. Salt [Lake] city. Present were, President Anthony W. Ivins, Dr. and Mrs. James E. Talmage, B.H. Roberts and Mrs. Roberts, James Moyle and Mrs. Moyle, Col Willard Young, Dr. Harris, BYU Provo; Dr. Pack, Dr. Kerr, Prof. Hinckley, Dr. Olsen, Dr. Middleton, J.M. Sjudahl. Mr. Moyle suggested that an association be formed for the study of American archeology with reference to Book of Mormon evidence. After an informed discussion, from 8:30 to 11pm it was decided to meet again and hear a lecture by Dr. Kerr on the trend of American Archeology during the last fifty years. The date for the next meeting set May 25.⁶⁷

The list now grew to include Alice Dinwoody Moyle, the wife of the lawyer/host; Colonel Willard Young, engineer, map-maker and son of Brigham Young as well as Book of Mormon archaeology enthusiast; Dr. Franklin Stewart Harris, Ph.D., agriculture scientist and president of Brigham Young University; Dr. Andrew Affleck Kerr, Ph.D., archaeologist at the University of Utah; a Professor Hinckley (either Bryant or Dr. Edwin Hinckley are the likely candidates);⁶⁸ Dr.

⁶⁶ The Relief Society was the LDS Church's charitable organization headed by women.

⁶⁷ Janne Sjudahl Journal, April 28, 1922. Janne Sjudahl Papers, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

⁶⁸ Bryant Hinckley was the father of future church president (and Moyle biographer) Gordon B. Hinckley. Edwin and Bryant were brothers. Though Edwin was more educated and a geologist, Bryant was more conveniently

Charles Ludwig Olsen, M.D., physician; and Dr. George Middleton, M.D., physician and archaeology enthusiast.

With such a wealth of names, it would be assumed that several other sources would have written about the meetings, but only Dr. Harris, BYU President, had a diary that was both available to researchers and had a corresponding entry. While it provided no details beyond the fact that he attended a meeting on the Book of Mormon in the Moyle home, his journal had nearly matching entries for April 28 and May 25 (Lyman must have forgotten to list him), confirming the known dates and adding one more: an entry for June 29, which was after Roberts left for his mission in New York on May 30.

As for the participants themselves, there may have been an expectation of secrecy involved. Though it is hard to imagine that participants would have made a binding oath with penalties like in the temple ceremony, it is possible that they solemnly promised one another not to speak about the meetings outside of their group or record details about what happened.⁶⁹ Keeping secrets, from polygamy to temple oaths, was a foundational part of Mormonism. The Mormons in attendance were very practiced in the art of holding their tongues. Other reasons that more information is not available could be simply that none of the participants kept a detailed journal, that journals describing such meetings have been

located and well connected. Both were educators, so either could be called “Professor.” Neither have papers available for this time period to help make certain which “Prof. Hinckley” was involved in the meetings.

⁶⁹ “Endowment Oaths and Ceremonies” *The Salt Lake Tribune*. February 09, 1906.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045396/1906-02-09/ed-1/seq-8/> (Accessed October 20, 2019): the first of three death oaths: We and each of us solemnly bind ourselves that we will not reveal any of the secrets of the first token of the Aaronic priesthood, with its accompanying name, sign, and penalty. Should I do so, I agree that my throat be cut from ear to ear, and my tongue torn out by its roots.

destroyed or kept from the public, or that they remain with descendants and are unavailable for research.

While it proved impossible to discover who created the group, it appeared to be a very deliberate guestlist. For example, it was probably not a coincidence that one member was a speech and language expert (Russell), considering that the first issue discussed in Roberts' papers was the conundrum of the wide proliferation of languages among native groups that had supposedly come from one fairly recent and well-developed language stock. Several others (Moyle, Sjodahl, Middleton, Young, and possibly others) had done research into central American archaeology and possible Book of Mormon ties. Many (Ivins, Roberts, Sjodahl, Talmage, and Young) had been on the committee to create a map for the new edition of the Book of Mormon in January 1921, before coming to the conclusion that they could not pinpoint an exact location.⁷⁰ It is probably also not a coincidence that the state's top Mormon archaeologist was there (although he was not an expert in central America, or as it turned out, in archaeology). Several members were scientists (Talmage, Pack, Harris) or physicians (Shipp-Roberts, Olsen, Middleton).

All must have been critical thinkers, having been educated at top universities, but faithful, as they remained active Mormons after their education. They all had strong ties to Mormonism. Most had been born and raised in Utah and they were all religious insiders. They were all active members in good standing and involved in their local congregations, as far as could be determined. Only one member was later excommunicated, but he was one of the apostles, and it was not due to lack of belief or loyalty to the church but because of adultery.

⁷⁰ See Janne Sjodahl chapter for a discussion of the geography meetings.

Some seemed to expand their belief in later years to include a more liberal “Christianity-based” belief, with a focus on Christian ideals and good works rather than a more conservative Mormon focus on obedience, doctrine, and devotion to the church. Others maintained a fairly literal belief and looked to archaeology to justify such belief.

Besides specific expertise and religious devotion, one major thing tied them all together: every one of the 13 men (besides Roberts and Ivins) and even one of the women had obtained advanced degrees “abroad”—meaning outside of Utah—which was a very significant detail. To compare, of the top 15 in church hierarchy at that time—the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve—only four members had obtained degrees outside the state; and three of the four had only recently been added to the group.⁷¹ Two of those apostles, Talmage and Lyman, represented both groups (apostle and intelligentsia). Even the most powerful group in Utah at the time, LDS Church leadership, did not have the kind of intellectual pedigree that had been assembled for these meetings.

That so many would be highly educated is especially remarkable when one considers the fact that Mormons had to ask permission from their church leaders to obtain an education, and this permission was given quite sparingly, especially for the older members of the group. Historian Thomas W. Simpson wrote about the tension surrounding the attainment of advanced degrees in his seminal work, *American Universities and the Birth of Modern Mormonism, 1867-1940*. Before the first manifesto denouncing polygamy (1890) and statehood in 1896, church leaders were trying to build a separate kingdom, apart from the rest of the world. They:

⁷¹ James E. Talmage, Ph.D., in geology became an apostle in 1911; Stephen L Richards, law degree, became an apostle in 1917; Richard R. Lyman, Ph.D. in engineering became an apostle in 1918; and John A. Widtsoe, Ph.D. in agronomy became an apostle in 1921.

authorized academic migration only insofar as it would maintain Mormon independence. Doctors, lawyers, and engineers were needed, but it was considered risky to send people to get the education. Mormon students were supposed to use their limited time in 'Babylon,' across enemy lines, to acquire the practical and professional expertise they needed to build the kingdom of God, a civilization that would be the envy of the world.⁷²

Education was obtained to build the kingdom of God. Leaders understood the benefits and the necessity of education, but "they feared that prolonged association with professors and peers would corrupt the students' faith," so they would only let the strongest and most faithful students go abroad for education.⁷³

Those who were in attendance at the Moyle meetings had passed through that gauntlet—they had been educated abroad and had maintained belief, likely making them the safest group that Roberts could share this information with. Those Mormons who held advanced degrees had already challenged their faith and found a way to maintain it while being broad thinkers as well.

For most of the people in the meeting, even getting the permission to obtain their education had been an enormous accomplishment. Simpson wrote of three eager young students seeking permission from church officials to go abroad. In 1881, a bright student named Horace Hall Cummings sought permission but was refused, "out of fear that education abroad would corrupt him spiritually."⁷⁴ Educated in Utah, he eventually became the head of the church's educational system. His initial disappointment hardened into a kind of "badge of honor. His opponents saw him as a small-minded foe" and he maintained a suspicion of "the

⁷² Simpson, 2.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Simpson, 33.

skillfully formed theories of learned men.”⁷⁵ In 1911 Cummings was a major force behind rooting out and expelling teachers from BYU deemed “too liberal” for teaching from books on Old and New Testament that were written by people outside the Mormon faith. It didn’t help that the teachers also believed in evolution and were familiar with modern biblical scholarship.

In a report that recommended firing these teachers, one can see on display the fears and attitudes harbored by some members of leadership. Cummings wrote that ideas imported from “eastern colleges” by “four or five of the teachers” were suspect. “Being so long in college with so little to help them resist the skillfully formed theories of learned men, they have accepted many which are erroneous, and being zealous teachers, are vigorously laboring to convince others of their views,” Cummings wrote. He felt that their passion for “the theories of men” threatened “the soundness of doctrine, the sweetness of spirit, and the general faithfulness” he sensed was characteristic of BYU students. He believed that “practically all the College students who I met...were most zealous in defending and propagating the new views.”⁷⁶ Three teachers were subsequently fired, though nearly all the students signed a petition of protest and it created a controversy that took quite a while for BYU overcome.

The year after Cummings was refused his request to attend an outside university, two other students were granted theirs. Both of them ended up in the 1922 meetings. In 1882, James Talmage sought a degree in science and James Moyle sought a degree in law. Both received stern warnings of the danger of such a pursuit but were reluctantly granted permission. Talmage was given a ritual blessing by apostle Brigham Young Jr., with a promise:

⁷⁵ Simpson, 71 and 92.

⁷⁶ Simpson, 74.

“If you seek inspiration you will perform your mission profitably; and your mind shall expand in the faith of the gospel as well as in letters”; and a warning to “guard your mind from yielding in the least degree to the spirit of infidelity.”⁷⁷ James Moyle received an even more ominous admonition during his blessing by President John Taylor, speaking for God, saying that “this is a dangerous profession, one that leads many people down to destruction.”⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Moyle would be blessed in this endeavor if he kept “clean hands and a pure heart,” feared God and worked righteously, abstained “from arguing falsely and on false principles,” and prayed daily for guidance and God’s blessing. But- “if thou doest not these things,” Moyle was warned, “thou wilt go down and wither away.”⁷⁹ Fortunately, Moyle did not wither away. He became one of Utah’s first lawyers, the leader of the Democratic Party, the first Mormon appointed to a federal sub-cabinet position, and the host of the Roberts intelligentsia meetings.

While Mormons were proud of their educated counterparts (and mourned those who found it difficult to return, feeding the narrative that it was dangerous to leave in the first place), their success “often left church leaders anxious to defend their authority.”⁸⁰ By 1918, Church president and prophet Joseph F. Smith expressed his discomfort with the new intellectuals:

God has revealed to us a simple and effectual way of serving Him, and we should regret very much to see the simplicity of those revelations involved in all sorts of philosophical speculations. If we encouraged them it would not be long before we should have a *theological scholastic aristocracy* in the Church, and we should therefore not enjoy the brotherhood that now is, or should be common to the rich and poor, learned and unlearned among the Saints.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Simpson, 33.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Simpson, 33, quoting James H. Moyle, *Mormon Democrat: The Religious and Political Memoirs of James Henry Moyle*, Gene Sessions, ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books), 110.

⁸⁰ Simpson, 3.

⁸¹ Simpson, 5.

For Joseph F. Smith, it was smarter to discourage education than risk having a new, educated group come into prominence. Even John A. Widtsoe, who was himself highly educated, encouraged students to get degrees in “practical” and “faith-promoting” subjects such as farming, as he had done.⁸²

This ambivalence toward education has been part of Mormonism since the beginning. Born into the religious energy of the Second Great Awakening and the populist fears and zeal of a brand-new government, and always on the edge of the frontier, Mormonism had begun with the idea that one did not need special degrees or learning in order to talk to God. In fact, it was an uneducated fourteen-year-old farmboy who said he had spoken to God face-to-face that started the entire movement. Simpson wrote, “Mormons’ populism led them to distrust philosophical speculation, believing that it obscured and even corrupted simple, common-sense truths.”⁸³ Several scriptures in the Book of Mormon link learning to pride. And yet, as Joseph Smith grew older and began to learn, Mormon scriptures began to include phrases such as “the glory of God is intelligence” and a belief that Mormonism gathers all truth into one great whole.⁸⁴ Truth was something to be valued and actively sought.

The people who gathered in the home of James Moyle were a special group, brought together to seek answers where none had been found by their ecclesiastical leaders—or at least not enough for the thinking man, according to Roberts in his conversation with Lloyd. When faced with information that undermined their previous confidence in Book of Mormon

⁸² For more information on Widtsoe and the de-emphasis of science in his later years, See Dale Campbell LeChaminant, “John A. Widtsoe: Rational Apologist,” Ph.D. diss. University of Utah, 1977, p. 165

⁸³ Simpson, 6.

⁸⁴ Doctrine and Covenants 93:36.

historicity, beliefs changed—whether a person decided to reject the findings of science and lean solely on faith, to believe that divinity and history did not have to be mutually exclusive, or to lose belief altogether. New ways of thinking were required in order to incorporate this new information. These ideas first found voice with the elite members of this small group of Mormon intellectuals, who, in addition to church leadership, were the first to grapple with the implications and challenges to their beliefs that this information presented.

It is also important for understanding of this episode of Mormon history to know who was recruited as part of the solution to a potentially existential problem in Mormon theology. As important, influential Mormons, their careers or interests often had influence and insight on larger issues faced by Mormons at the time, so in addition to their biographies there is often a short exploration of that aspect of Mormon life, such as education, science, feminist issues, polygamy, Book of Mormon archaeology, or the hierarchy. As a varied group of people, their collective stories paint a vibrant illustration of Mormon life in this transitional time.

Discussion of each member appears in order of their perceived involvement. B. H. Roberts, of course, was at the center of raising these issues. In addition to Roberts, Anthony Ivins and James E. Talmage were present at every meeting, both with leadership and the Moyle meetings. All were also involved in the geography meetings held in January 1921. Janne Sjodahl was a member of those geography meetings, and (along with Talmage) was part of the committee that updated the footnotes to the Book of Mormon. Sjodahl also attended at least two of the three known Moyle meetings, so he is presumed to be an important force. As hosts and attendees of all three meetings, James and Alice Moyle follow in the list of perceived

involvement.⁸⁵ Franklin Harris, who also attended three meetings, is listed next. From there, half of the intellectuals attended both meetings for which the list is known, and their biographies follow in alphabetical order.⁸⁶ Those who attended only one of the two listed meetings (but who could have been at the third for which there is no extant list), have biographies appearing in chronological (based on which meeting they attended) and alphabetical order.

Each member of the intelligentsia present at the Moyle meetings encountered the challenging information, and for most of them, some kind of intellectual adjustment in their faith can be detected. This change was often even passed to their children. It was the children of several of these members who eventually brought Roberts's studies forward to general knowledge after holding it close for sixty years.⁸⁷

Biographies of attendees-



Brigham Henry Roberts (1857-1933), who preferred to be called

B. H., was sixty-five at the time of the meetings. His Book of Mormon research was the catalyst for the meetings at the Moyle home.

Whether he personally arranged them is unknown, but they were

discussing “external evidences of the genuineness of the Book of Mormon” and “Book of

⁸⁵ The third meeting, held on June 29, 1922, is known to include Harris, (who noted it in a journal) and Moyle (who hosted it according to Harris). It is presumed NOT to include Roberts, who was by then in New York. Talmage's journal simply noted a committee meeting and Lyman's journal has no entry for that date.

⁸⁶ Harris, Ivins, the Moyles, Pack, the Robertses, Sjodahl, and the Talmages.

⁸⁷ See chapter on “The Next Generation”

Mormon problems” just weeks after he had presented the same information to church authorities.⁸⁸

Three biographical books have been written about Roberts, all published after *Studies* brought Roberts back into public consciousness over fifty years after his death. BYU professor Truman Madsen, working on a Roberts biography in 1965, was told by church officials to discontinue the project. He was ultimately allowed to continue “with the understanding that it would be cleared with the publications committee of the church before actually being published.”⁸⁹ Even with that caveat, publication was withheld for fifteen years, and some believed it was an intentional attempt to forget about Roberts.⁹⁰ The timing seemed to support this assumption—Madsen’s biography was released only after B. H. Roberts’s papers had been discovered and donated to University of Utah.

The title, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story*, and the book itself seemed to be an attempt to reconstruct and fortify the image of Roberts for the church rather than a true attempt to recount his history. Even the review in *BYU Studies* for the book complained of historical errors and inaccuracies, saying Roberts “would undoubtedly have rolled over in his grave to hear himself called ‘an independent’” who had been involved in politics “from the wings,” and noted the suspicious exclusion of Roberts’s most “controversial problems” while

⁸⁸ James E. Talmage Journal, April 28 and May 25, 1922; Richard R. Lyman journal, May 25, 1922.

⁸⁹ Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 73. Quoting Wilkinson to Belnap, 26 Feb. 1966, UA 584 (cf. College of Religious Instruction Departmental Chairmen’s Minutes, 2 March 1966).

⁹⁰ A February 1986 letter from Sterling McMurrin to Truman Madsen mentions knowledge that Madsen was “ordered to discontinue work on the Roberts book. As I have told you before, I regard it as a very worthwhile book, and you did a good thing in publishing it. It is my honest opinion that after he died some Church leaders wanted to forget that Roberts had ever lived. You made him live again.” Sterling McMurrin Papers.

including detailed accounts about things of much less significance.⁹¹ Two other books simply reprint Roberts's own words. One was his unfinished autobiography; the published was his journals from 1880-1898, mostly about his early adventures as a missionary in the American South.⁹²

B. H. Roberts had overcome difficulty throughout his life. As he later wrote, "My childhood was a nightmare; my boyhood a tragedy."⁹³ When he was four years old, his father abandoned the family and his mother left him with friends in England when she moved to Utah to join the Saints. The next five years in England were marked with fear, neglect, and abuse for the child, often sleeping under tables in a saloon while his foster parents drank. At nine years old, he traveled with a sister to Utah, mostly walking barefoot across the plains, three years before the transcontinental railroad would make the journey much easier. Roberts struggled to learn, then taught himself everything he could.

In 1878 he graduated first in his class from University of Deseret, the teacher-preparatory school precursor to the University of Utah, and married his first wife, Sarah Louisa Smith, with whom he had seven children. A few years later he married his second wife, Celia Dibble, with whom he had eight children. Roberts spent more than fifteen years of his life on missions for the church. The first mission began in 1880, shortly after he first married, leaving his young wife and first child (and then his other wife and subsequent children) behind, visiting

⁹¹ Thomas Alexander, review of Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* in *BYU Studies* vol 21:2 (Spring 1981), 249.

⁹² See James Gary Bergera, ed. *The Autobiography of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990) and John Sillitoe, ed. *History's Apprentice History's Apprentice: The Diaries of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

⁹³ Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 1.

home occasionally but spending most of his time in the Southern States mission for nearly ten years.

Roberts was hailed as a hero for a famous incident in 1884 when a mob in the small town of Cane Creek, Tennessee, killed two missionaries and two members of the local congregation. At great personal risk, Roberts dressed up as a “tramp” and retrieved the bodies of the two slain missionaries to return them to their families.⁹⁴ He joined the church hierarchy in 1888 as a member of the First Council of the Seventy, a group whose main focus was missions, education, and church administration. In 1889, Roberts spent five months in prison for unlawful cohabitation (polygamy).

Roberts was involved in Democratic politics and nearly resigned from his church position in protest in 1896 when church leadership demanded that he ask permission before running for political office. He believed church leadership should not direct people on political issues, and that they should especially avoid bringing the will of God into political debate. Though he eventually submitted to leadership’s demand that he obtain permission to seek office, he continually resented the involvement of church leaders in partisan politics, especially because the majority of his colleagues in church leadership were Republicans.⁹⁵ He served in the Utah Constitutional Convention in 1895 and argued vigorously against women’s suffrage (despite the church leadership’s general support for suffrage) because it would be “unnecessary and unwholesome” for women to participate in politics, and he believed such a provision would

⁹⁴ Madsen, *Defender of the Faith*, 150. fn 42

⁹⁵ D. Craig Mikkelsen, “The Politics of B. H. Roberts,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, v9 n2 (Winter 1987), 28. According to Mikkelsen, Roberts believed he was able to separate his church leadership from his politics and that his colleagues were not, though he was also known to bring the authority of God into his political views.

make the constitution harder to ratify.⁹⁶ He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives as a Democrat from Utah but was denied his seat in Congress in 1900 due to his status as a polygamist.

Though at age sixty Roberts was too old for military service, an exception was made when he served in France as a Chaplain during World War I (from 1917-1919). He was president of the Eastern States mission headquartered in New York from 1922-1927. He suffered from depression, headaches, and struggled with alcohol throughout his life and died due to complications from diabetes in 1933 at the age of 76.⁹⁷

Sterling McMurrin, who had known Roberts as a child, and whose grandfather served with Roberts in the First Council of the Seventy wrote the biographical essay for *Studies*. He explained that:

Roberts lived during a crucial period for Mormonism. The original prophetic impulse was waning, the major feats of pioneering were accomplished, and the struggles with the federal government and their aftermath were taking a severe toll of human energy and threatening the economic and institutional life of the Church. More than anything else, the Mormon Church needed the defenses that would justify its existence, establish moral and intellectual respectability, and guarantee its own integrity.⁹⁸

Roberts was ready to help the church become more salient for members in a new stage of their development. He encouraged young people to become educated in order to help Mormonism “rout their critics.”⁹⁹ In addition to his being a vital part of bridging Mormonism from one

⁹⁶ Mikkelsen, 28. Women had been granted suffrage in the territory of Utah from 1870-1887 but it had been taken away as part of the Edmunds-Tucker Act.

⁹⁷ John Sillitoe, ed. *History's Apprentice History's Apprentice: The Diaries of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), introduction.

⁹⁸ Sterling McMurrin, “B. H. Roberts” in Roberts, *Studies*, xix

⁹⁹ Scott Kenney, “E. E. Ericksen: Loyal Heretic,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, July-August 1978, 16.

iteration to the next, Roberts represented and could draw from the strengths of the past.

According to McMurrin:

Roberts belonged to the era of great Mormon oratory...before the microphone and camera robbed the Mormon conferences of much of their character and vitality and inspiration, the days when the Mormon Church both valued and invited argument and debate. There was then a kind of intellectual openness about the Church which encouraged thought and discussion; its faith and confidence were firm and aggressive, and it was ready to take on all comers...Roberts was at once its chief intellectual exhibit and its most competent advocate.¹⁰⁰

Roberts was confident in the church's ability to change with the times and was not afraid to point out areas of needed improvement. Through that process, he was a major factor in making the church what it would be. Though his vision of boldly reconciling science with faith was not what triumphed at the time, in many ways it was the reaction to him that led the church to adopt a more cautious approach to theology, shaping the church as reactionary rather than revolutionary as it had been in the past.

After his Book of Mormon studies, Roberts wrote one more great work, his *magnum opus*, a manuscript called *The Truth, the Way, the Life*. He called it "the most important book that I have yet contributed to the church."¹⁰¹ He hoped it would help Mormon doctrine expand and grow beyond the mere repetition of previous truths that grow stale over time:

The disciples of "Mormonism," growing discontented with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will yet take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and, departing from mere repetition, will cast them in new formulas; co-operating in the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression, and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of its development.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ McMurrin, "B. H. Roberts", in Roberts, *Studies*, xx.

¹⁰¹ B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994)

¹⁰² B. H. Roberts, "The Book of Mormon Translated," *Improvement Era* 9 (April 1906): 712.712-13; As quoted in James B. Allen, *The Story of The Truth, The Way, The Life*, BYU Studies, 1993

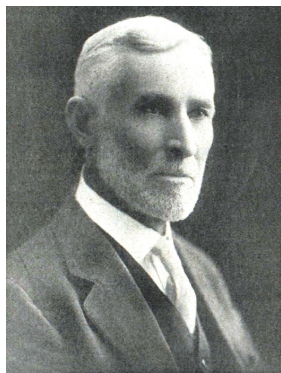
He submitted his book to the First Presidency, who deemed it too controversial to publish due to his views on evolution (he believed in evolution, with the possible exception of humans), the age of the earth (in the millions, not thousands of years), the pre-earth existence, and the eternal progression of God. As part of his search for answers, Roberts opened debates on evolution and the age of the earth among leadership in 1931, which were called in a draw; the church decided to take “no position.”¹⁰³ It maintains that stance to the current day. During the heated discussions where he was told to make changes, Roberts held his ground. He told leadership he would rather let the book go unpublished than compromise his work. It remained unpublished until 1994 and fills eight hundred pages in paperback.

He had many limits, such as his tendency to stick too firmly to literal biblical interpretations and his biased views of history, though he was more willing than others of his generation to admit the faults of previous church leaders. Leonard Arrington would call Roberts “the intellectual leader of the Mormon people in the era of Mormonism's finest intellectual attainment.”¹⁰⁴ McMurrin would contextualize such a statement: “Roberts was not a theologian of the first order, as he was not a major historian. He was simply the best theologian and historian that Mormonism had in its first century.”¹⁰⁵ Roberts looked deeply into Mormonism and hoped to bring it into the modern world, to make it applicable for the coming generations.

¹⁰³ More detail on this episode in the James E. Talmage chapter as well as the “The Next Generation” chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Leonard J. Arrington, “The Intellectual Tradition of the Latter-day Saints,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* vol 4 (Spring 1969), 22.

¹⁰⁵ McMurrin, “B. H. Roberts,” in *Studies*, xxvi. For more information on Sterling McMurrin, see upcoming “The Next Generation” chapter.”



Anthony Woodward Ivins (1854- 1934) was the beloved cousin of

and counselor in the First Presidency to Heber J. Grant. Ivins's father and

Grant's mother (whose husband died when Grant was nine days old)

were siblings and their two sons were close in age. Like Roberts and

James Moyle, he was a dedicated Democrat, and Moyle's reminiscences

often refer to Ivins as a steadying hand in the Grant presidency.¹⁰⁶ A religious pragmatist, Ivins believed that "demonstrated truth will always be in harmony with [God's revealed word], for he is the author of all truth," and stressed that church members not "ignore the truths which have come to the world as a result of scientific research."¹⁰⁷ Ivins felt that truth could only be expanded by scientific discovery.

The seventy-year-old apostle had been present for the January 1922 leadership meetings and was a member of the committee that met in February of that year to create a response to Riter's letter. He also participated in the Moyle meetings and was likely considered to be the foremost authority on Book of Mormon geography. He was likely one of the first Mormons to propose a limited-geography theory of the Book of Mormon when he presented his ideas at the geography meetings held in January 1921.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Gene Sessions, ed. *Mormon Democrat: The Religious and Political Memoirs of James Henry Moyle* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 33 fn 43.

¹⁰⁷ Gary Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 50. Quoting Conference Reports, Oct. 1925

¹⁰⁸ See chapter on Janne Sjodahl for more information regarding the Geography meetings. Ivins may have been inspired by a book by RLDS author Louis Edward Hills written in 1919 proposing a limited geography for the Book of Mormon.

Because Ivins seemed so knowledgeable about the Book of Mormon, Roberts found his lack of answers the most disappointing. After the January 4 and 5 leadership meetings Roberts sent a letter to President Grant expressing that fact:

There was so much said that was utterly irrelevant, and so little said, if anything at all, that was helpful in the matters at issue that I came away from the conference quite disappointed...You perhaps may think differently because of what was said by President Ivins. Referring to that I shall make bold to say, though I trust without giving offense, for that is farthest from my purpose, that what he said...was most disappointing of all, because I had come to believe from what I had heard of him, that he has so specialized in the Book of Mormon and literature bearing upon it, that one could confidently expect something like substantial help from his contribution of comment. It was this perhaps that made his contribution so disappointing.¹⁰⁹

Part of Roberts' frustration was that Ivins had used a thoroughly discredited "expert"—a spiritualist who also believed Mayans had used the electronic telegraph—to "satisfy himself completely" about the Book of Mormon linguistic problems. Roberts was glad that Ivins had made such comments in private and not in a place "where it would be open to the comment of unfriendly critics who would so easily turn it into ridicule," a comment which showed that Roberts was sensitive about outside ridicule. Clearly, Roberts was expecting Ivins to be one of the people who might be able to come up with intelligent and/or inspired answers to such questions, but that was not the case.

The third leadership meeting (January 26) appears to have been a chance for Ivins to present a rebuttal to this letter rather than another session of Roberts simply presenting more information. Richard R. Lyman wrote of the meeting on January 26: "Brother Ivins made a fine address on Book of Mormon prompted by letter from B.H. Roberts."¹¹⁰ Heber J. Grant reported

¹⁰⁹ B. H. Roberts to Heber J. Grant, January 9, 1922. See Roberts, *Studies*, 47-50.

¹¹⁰ Richard R. Lyman Journal, January 26, 1922.

in his journal on that same day: “Bro Ivins made a long explanation on Book of Mormon matters, and Bro. B. H. Roberts was present and he also made an extensive talk.”¹¹¹ According to these two journals, Ivins was the main presenter at the meeting, however Talmage did not note Ivins’s involvement when he wrote that the meeting was partly devoted to “hearing of further report by Elder B. H. Roberts on the subject of “Book of Mormon ‘Difficulties.’”¹¹² If Lyman’s journal noting a “fine address” and the lack of further leadership meetings is any indication, Ivins’s arguments were enough to soothe many in leadership that the problem was not as dire as Roberts believed. This was probably the meeting where apostles stood one by one and bore testimony, where Roberts vowed to continue his studies, and where Lyman offended him with the comment that Roberts should leave the subject alone if it would only add to the problems they had already encountered.

If not for Talmage and Sjodahl’s journal entries about the geography meetings, as well as this letter expressing Roberts’ disappointment, it might not have been known that Ivins was interested in finding physical evidence of the Book of Mormon. People like Moyle and Sjodahl became known in later years for their presentations on archaeology, but Ivins was more circumspect (probably because his position would have given more weight to his opinion than he wished). In a General Conference session in 1927 he urged:

We must be careful in the conclusions that we reach. The Book of Mormon teaches the history of three distinct peoples, or two peoples and three different colonies of people, who came from the old world to this continent. It does not tell us that there was no one here before them. It does not tell us that people did not come after. And so if discoveries are made which suggest differences in race origins, it can very easily be accounted for, and reasonably, for we do believe that other people came to this continent...

¹¹¹ Heber J. Grant journal quoted by Leonard Arrington, Leonard Arrington Papers.

¹¹² James Talmage Journal, January 26, 1922.

There is a great deal of talk about the geography of the Book of Mormon. Where was the land of Zarahemla? Where was the City of Zarahemla? and other geographic matters. It does not make any difference to us. There has never been anything yet set forth that definitely settles that question. So the Church says we are just waiting until we discover the truth. All kinds of theories have been advanced. I have talked with at least half a dozen men that have found the very place where the City of Zarahemla stood, and notwithstanding the fact that they profess to be Book of Mormon students, they vary a thousand miles apart in the places they have located. We do not offer any definite solution. As you study the Book of Mormon keep these things in mind and do not make definite statements concerning things that have not been proven in advance to be true.¹¹³

In this address, Ivins first warned people to be careful about making conclusions, then opened the possibility that other people had existed in the Americas that were not part of the Book of Mormon narrative (an idea that Roberts rejected based on Book of Mormon verses about the land being saved for the Nephites/Lamanites where man had never been), then mentioned the possibility of a different geography than had been assumed by most church members, and finally warned people again not to make conclusions. Ivins appeared to be gently introducing members to the idea that the Book of Mormon people and geography may be different than they had assumed.

Ivins had the reputation of being a fair-minded person who championed the underdog. His son Grant recalled a conversation between Ivins and the prophet (Heber J. Grant) regarding who should belong to the church: “There are some, even at the church office, who think all people who differ from them should be cut off the church. My uncle Heber once said to father, ‘Tone, we ought to cut them all off the church.’” Anthony Ivins disagreed, answering, “Heber,

¹¹³ Anthony W. Ivins, *Conference Report* (April 1929), 16.

they are the church.”¹¹⁴ Although Ivins was a top leader of the church, he did not claim leadership to have sole authority over it.

One of Ivins’s greatest impacts on the church was his complicated connection to polygamy. According to an article written by his son-in-law for a church magazine just after Ivins was appointed to the church presidency in 1921, Ivins recalled seeing his future wife, Elizabeth A. Snow, when she was six and he was nine. He decided immediately that he would not be satisfied until she was his wife.¹¹⁵ They married in 1878, well before the first ban on polygamy in 1890, but Ivins did not marry any other women. They had eight children together.

Ivins had been considered a top candidate for the Democratic nomination for Governor in 1895 when he was suddenly called by church leaders to preside over a colony in Mexico. Years later, Ivins’s son Grant was asked if his father had been “banished” in order to secure a Republican victory and as punishment for his opposition to church policies. Grant replied:

Our family did not subscribe to that rumor as a fact. After reading Larson’s book, I am ready to change my mind. After reading of the lengths to which the First Presidency went to make certain that Utah would go Republican in the election soon to follow my father’s ‘call’ to go to Mexico, I am very strongly of the opinion that his activity and popularity in the political field may have been a deciding factor in his ‘banishment’ to Mexico.¹¹⁶

Ivins and his family saw this move to Mexico as a duty to God and did not believe that church leaders were trying to steer politics. However, at least one family member later concluded, after seeing the way everything evolved, that they had not realized what was happening at the time and that politics were more involved in the call than they had assumed.

¹¹⁴ H. Grant Ivins to Heber Holt, April 8, 1968. H. Grant Ivins papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

¹¹⁵ Guy C. Wilson, “President Anthony Ivins,” *The Young Woman's Journal*, Volume 32 (1921), pp. 264-268

¹¹⁶ H. Grant Ivins to Bob (last name unknown), December 27, 1973. H. Grant Ivins Papers, Marriott Library. See also Gustive O. Larson, *The “Americanization” of Utah for Statehood*, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1971).

Although polygamy was also illegal in Mexico, this colony was unofficially intended as a place for people to practice polygamy without breaking the laws of the United States following the church's 1890 Manifesto (which was a renunciation of polygamy).¹¹⁷ Ivins performed dozens of post-manifesto marriages as the stake president (head of several congregations) in Colonia Juarez, Mexico from 1895-1907. At first, he would only perform marriages after receiving a coded letter from the First Presidency authorizing them. Eventually he was given the authority to decide for himself. He was reportedly rather conflicted with this task and rather stingy with permission, though he performed one for his own daughter, Anna, in 1903.¹¹⁸

Historian D. Michael Quinn wrote that half of the general authorities "either sanctioned, performed, or entered into new marriages during that fourteen-year period," including at least 8 of 19 apostles who married new wives during that time.¹¹⁹ During the 1904 hearings in Congress to debate whether or not to seat Utah's newly-elected Senator and church apostle Reed Smoot, this continued practice of polygamy was alleged, denied, and exposed, causing embarrassment to the church. This prompted the 1904 Second Manifesto and a promise to excommunicate anyone who entered into polygamy from that time forth.

Church leaders insisted that people who had participated in polygamy since 1890 had been acting alone, against leadership's wishes. In the words of President Joseph F. Smith at the hearings, "There never has been a plural marriage by the consent or sanction or knowledge or

¹¹⁷ Polygamy was also illegal in Mexico, but enforcement was weak. A similar colony was located in Canada. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/the-manifesto-and-the-end-of-plural-marriage?lang=eng& r=1> (Accessed October 15, 2019)

¹¹⁸ D. Michael Quinn, *Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 240.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

approval of the church since the [1890] manifesto.”¹²⁰ Though hundreds of people knew otherwise, no one came forward with proof (such as a coded letter granting permission by the First Presidency). Ivins was made an apostle in 1907 after proving his value and loyalty to the church. Though being monogamous likely kept him from joining the highest levels of church leadership before 1904, after that point it gave him an advantage, as at least half of the previous leadership was suddenly ineligible for such a visible position.

Though Ivins was loyal and did what he was told, he was not comfortable with what he had been asked to do. In 1921, Richard Lyman recorded in his journal a conversation in which Ivins admitted to the difficulty of having been “instructed to tell the Mex. Government he was not there to perform plural marriages and at the same time he was instructed [by church officials] to perform plural marriages.”¹²¹ It did not feel right to lie to the Mexican government, but he had done it because he had been told to do so by his superiors in the church. Faced with the choice of obeying the law or obeying God’s orders (as requested through his priesthood leaders), Ivins chose to disregard his discomfort and follow orders.

In 1933, while Grant was still church president and Ivins was still a member of the First Presidency, fellow counselor J. Reuben Clark drafted and issued (presumably with their permission), a First Presidency Statement to end polygamy once and for all. It was intended to stop the now truly rogue members who had continued the secret practice of polygamy. The fourteen-page statement “sidestepped or denied verifiable facts about polygamy,”¹²² denying a

¹²⁰Gospel Topics Essays, “The Manifesto and the End of Plural Marriage”
<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/topics/the-manifesto-and-the-end-of-plural-marriage?lang=eng> (Accessed September 25, 2019)

¹²¹ Lyman, Diary, March 29, 1921.

¹²² Quinn, *Elder Statesman*, 246

“pretended” revelation of church president John Taylor in September 1886 (which said that polygamy would continue until Jesus returns), and insisted that “church archives held no such record or corroboration of any such revelation,” though notes of leadership meetings in church archives show it being discussed as a reality in previous years.¹²³

Because so many knew otherwise, the deceptive half-truths in the statement marked the beginning of the Mormon fundamentalist movement in 1933. At that point, some who continued to believe in polygamy decided to break with the church and actively seek recruits to their cause rather than quietly trying to avoid being noticed and excommunicated as they continued the practice.

Ivins’s son, Grant, lost faith in church leadership due to the deception involved in the continued practice of polygamy and the refusal to take accountability while casting people who had simply been obedient (like his father) as rogue. He explained to a friend in 1967:

The continual announcement that the Church has never sanctioned polygamy since the Woodruff Manifesto [1890] is so ridiculous, and it makes “bastards”...out of hundreds of children who were born in polygamy after the Manifesto...I wrote the Presidency about this back in the 40s...suggesting that they be honest and tell the truth about Polygamy in Mexico and even in Utah. They simply replied that “All the world knows the history of polygamy in the church.”¹²⁴

Knowing that “all the world” did not know the true history of the church’s practice of polygamy, Grant Ivins (assisted in research by his brother Stanley) sought to educate the world and expose the church’s deceptive practices regarding polygamy in his pamphlet, *Polygamy in Mexico as Practiced by the Mormon Church, 1895-1905*.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ H. Grant Ivins to Lowry Nelson, April 7, 1967. H. Grant Ivins Papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

¹²⁵ See H. Grant Ivins, *Polygamy in Mexico as Practiced by the Mormon Church, 1895-1905* ed. Fred Collier. Collier’s Publishing Co, 1981.

While Anthony Ivins was willing to sacrifice a political career, defend the Book of Mormon while looking for alternative explanations, and keep quiet about his involvement in polygamy letting himself be cast as a rogue zealot, his son wanted to correct the historical record, clear his father's name, and demand accountability from the organization. He was not the only son of Moyle meeting participants who sought to correct the record.¹²⁶ Grant Ivins was the person who discovered the B. H. Roberts manuscripts and sought to bring them to light. Though like his father, Grant had been a devoted member of the church who believed in the divine authority of the church hierarchy in his early life, even serving a mission and teaching religion at BYU from 1929-1942, unlike his father, he characterized the hierarchy in his later years as "mere men who make mistakes and who should be willing to admit these mistakes."¹²⁷



Dr. James Edward Talmage (1862-1933) was sixty years old at the time of the meetings, the person whose extensive journals established the dates for the leadership, committee, and Moyle meetings, though the entries generally lacked detail on what was said or who attended. As an apostle, as well as a Ph.D. scientist, he was an important figure during this

time because he could bridge the gap between the hierarchy and the intellectuals. He was also part of the special committee assigned by President Grant to help Roberts answer the Riter letter. Talmage was an outspoken supporter of science and religion, though the science portion receded somewhat over time, to the disappointment of many intellectuals.

¹²⁶ See "The Next Generation" chapter.

¹²⁷ H. Grant Ivins to Heber Holt, Marriott Library

The first apostle with a Ph.D. (chemistry and geology), Talmage was called to the position in 1911. Oddly, there is very little written about him even though he was considered one of Mormonism's best theologians. A 2007 BYU Master's thesis about his theological contributions confirmed the difficulty: "Unfortunately, information on this Latter-day Saint leader is difficult to find. Such information is sparse at best."¹²⁸ He remains one of Mormonism's most important thinkers and wrote classic works such as *Articles of Faith* and *Jesus the Christ*, both widely read. The latter is still recommended reading for LDS missionaries over a hundred years after its first printing (1915).

James Talmage's son wrote a book about his father that was based on his journals. The journals gave details of what he did, but rarely ventured into the way he felt about things (which was why the entry reassuring himself about horses following the leadership meetings was so remarkable). John Talmage told about an incident when his father, as a child, accidentally blinded his five-year old brother Albert, who had approached him from behind as he was working with a digging fork. Albert's left eye was damaged and had to be removed and his right eye became "sympathetically affected," leaving him almost completely blind throughout his life. Although Albert had plenty of support and lived a good life, Talmage's son believed that "more than any other event, or series of events, this awful occurrence may account for the deep, almost fanatical dedication to work, to Church duties, and to all the serious adult responsibilities that marked the life of young James E. Talmage from that terrible

¹²⁸ Brian W. Ricks, "James E. Talmage and the nature of the Godhead: The Gradual unfolding of Latter-day Saint Theology" (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2007), 3.

day forward.”¹²⁹ John felt the trauma and guilt related to that incident was the source of his father’s unrelenting drive which kept him working around the clock, often sleeping in his office for days at a time. This kind of dedication to church duties (often at the expense of his family) was surely a boon to the organization.

Only two Mormon students, James Moyle and James Talmage, were allowed to leave for college in 1882, so surely the two men had some kind of personal bond. Before leaving for Lehigh University in 1882, Talmage proclaimed it was the “mission” of devout Mormons like himself to “redeem” the sciences from “infidelity and skepticism.”¹³⁰ As time went on, he began to worry that he would be convinced by science, rather than the other way around. He also grew concerned that he might miss opportunities to benefit from what he was learning if he held too tightly to his previous beliefs: “I am between two fires in my own conscience- what shall I do? Rely upon my priesthood, as a touchstone, to detect at all truth from error.”¹³¹ He decided to hold onto his faith. Talmage knew he was in good company wrestling with the science/theology debate. He wrote in 1884, his last year at Johns Hopkins, “I have feared that my investigation of the subject was highly superficial, for when such great men, as most of the writers upon this subject are, find a puzzle, ‘twould be high egotism for me to say ‘I find no puzzle.’”¹³² He realized these questions did not have easy answers, that even the greatest minds struggled to find a balance.

¹²⁹ John R. Talmage, *The Talmage Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972) no page listed. As quoted in Ricks thesis, 23.

¹³⁰ Talmage journal, June 17, 1882. As quoted in Thomas W. Simpson, *American Universities*, 34.

¹³¹ Talmage Journals, June 17, 1872. As quoted in Simpson, 94. In Mormonism, males get the priesthood starting at the age of 12. Conferred in a special blessing, it is the power to act in the name of God and authorizes them to give blessings and perform church ordinances.

¹³² James Talmage Journals, March 16, 1884.

The more he learned, the more Talmage realized that populist ideas and fears often created simplistic explanations of complex issues. During his university studies, he recalled a Presbyterian minister's sermon on Darwin. He wrote that the preacher "spoke much as an ordinary person would—'Darwin. Ah, yes—says we come from monkeys'—then condemns."

Talmage concluded:

I certainly think 'tis ministers themselves who have bred the disgust with which most scientific people regard them—because they will dabble with matters from which their ignorance should keep them at a safe distance...Darwin wrote for those who can understand him; some of whom will agree and others oppose him; but he did not write for ministers who never read beyond others' opinions of the man, anymore than Plato or Socrates wrote for babes and sucklings.¹³³

It was clear that Talmage was not completely opposed to what Darwin wrote. He would later find the kinds of simplistic and uneducated denunciations he had condemned coming from his own colleagues in church leadership, but then had little choice but to stay silent on the subject. Scripture required public unanimity for the Quorum of the Twelve and would not permit him to publicly denounce something a fellow apostle said.

Talmage's position in church leadership was likely the result of an academic freedom controversy at BYU in 1911.¹³⁴ His appointment to the position of apostle during that year was possibly an attempt to maintain credibility for the church by embracing intellectuals who displayed loyalty to the church and faith in its distinct doctrines. At the time of his appointment, he was President of the University of Utah, but quit to assume the position of apostle, the first to hold a Ph.D. in science. Joseph T. Kingsbury, the non-Mormon who followed Talmage as president of the University of Utah, told a friend that Talmage believed "his appointment meant

¹³³ Ibid, May 4, 1884.

¹³⁴ See also, Simpson, *American Universities*, 73-79.

by implication that he, being the educated man of the church, had the great responsibility of combating evolution.”¹³⁵ Kingsbury, believing that Talmage embraced evolution, observed that Talmage immediately began delivering “hypocritical” attacks in public on evolution.

Kingsbury was probably not entirely wrong. Talmage’s job description had shifted from scientist to God’s spokesman. Any disagreement Talmage had with his less intellectually inclined colleagues would have to stay behind the scenes. Because they were free to affirm old ideas but not to advance any new ones until all were in agreement, Talmage was often silent about issues like evolution and the age of the earth while others in the quorum railed against it, following the lead of previous leaders. Many intellectuals felt abandoned by him, believing he knew better and thought differently, but refused to speak up.¹³⁶

However, sometimes Talmage (and others) worked behind the scenes to dissent. One instance is illustrated by an exchange of letters in 1931 between Talmage and his son, Sterling, also a geologist, who held a Ph.D. from Harvard. Talmage, out of the scientific field for 20 years by that time, was not up to date on the most current scientific findings and asked his son about the current scientific consensus. Talmage’s fellow apostle, Joseph Fielding Smith had been using a book entitled *The New Geology* by George McCready Price to undermine science and argue for a young earth, and Talmage asked his son for an opinion on the work. Sterling replied, “All of Price’s arguments, in principle at least, were advanced and refuted from fifty to a hundred years ago. They are not ‘new.’ His ideas certainly are not ‘Geology.’ *With these two corrections,*

¹³⁵ Henry Peterson autobiographical notes, Henry Peterson Papers, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. Quoted in Simpson, 188.

¹³⁶ Simpson, 84.

the title remains the best part of the book.”¹³⁷ Talmage, using the direction his son had provided, then privately argued against Smith’s findings in leadership meetings.

James Talmage also worked through other people to dissent at times, since he was not allowed to say some things directly. In a June 1931 letter to his father, Sterling Talmage wrote, “for several years I have been annoyed and irritated,—those terms are too mild, ‘affronted’ and ‘challenged’ would be better—by the type of thing you mention regarding no death on the earth, etc.” Sterling sent his father the draft of a strongly worded letter he had written to Joseph Fielding Smith to get his father’s input.

Sterling Talmage’s letter was not subtle in its condemnation of Smith’s position. The address that so enraged Sterling Talmage was one in which Smith affirmed the literal, miraculous quality of the Bible while trying to explain it in pseudo-scientific terms. In describing the battle where “the sun stood still, and the moon stayed”¹³⁸ until the fighting ended, Smith posited that the earth must have slowed gradually, then stopped spinning for a short while. Sterling’s “open letter” to Smith and the First Presidency pointed out that “If the earth were brought to a stop in several hours . . . there would ensue world-wide west winds, ranging from a thousand miles an hour on the equator to nothing at the poles, but passing over Palestine at a rate *fully six times as great as in the most violent recorded hurricanes.*”¹³⁹ He worried that such statements would harm the church’s ability to retain the youth and continued:

In your boyhood, and in mine, the statements of the General Authorities of the Church were considered to be final; nobody in good standing in the Church presumed to question them. Today that is not so, and I believe for only one reason, namely, that

¹³⁷ Sterling Talmage to James Talmage, 9 Feb. 1931, S. Talmage Papers; italics Talmage’s.

¹³⁸ Joshua 10:3.

¹³⁹ Sterling B. Talmage, “An Open Letter to Joseph Fielding Smith,” June 28, 1931, 4. Emphasis in original. Sterling Talmage Papers.

some of the authorities have made statements that are not worthy of belief, and I cite your explanation of the miracle at Joshua's battle as a conspicuous but by no means an isolated example of what I mean.¹⁴⁰

He then promised, for the sake of the "educated young people of the Church" to take every opportunity to "prove point by point by point that our faith is not founded on absurdity"¹⁴¹ and challenged Smith to stick with what he knows—doctrine—and leave science to the scientists.

After making a few minor edits to his son's letter, James Talmage replied, "I think it should be put into final shape and sent to its intended addressee without delay . . . The conditions are peculiar but in my judgment *and in that of certain others* it is well to follow the course intended. I wish I could write in fuller measure of the conditions that have called forth your letter. But you have done . . . a good work. Finish it up."¹⁴² Far from discouraging his son from speaking out against his elder, Talmage lamented that he could not do more to help and encouraged him to send it to the First Presidency as well as Smith.

One can imagine Smith's response to this affront to his authority and expertise. His reply took three years to draft; he may have decided out of courtesy to respond once James Talmage died in 1933. The letter gives insight into the role Smith felt called to fulfill:

I live in the full confidence that when the Lord comes... many things accepted in the theories of men today will be found to be untrue and these theories will have to be discarded or reconstructed to conform to the revelations which are to come. There is nothing in all the world so dear to me as revealed truth—the Gospel with all its amplifications received through the word of the Lord to his prophets, even in our own day.

When I think I find something which tends to destroy the faith of the youth in these revelations, or which is hurtful to this truth, I have opposed it with vigor and have freely

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, emphasis in original, 10.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴² James Talmage to Sterling Talmage, 23 June 1931, Sterling B. Talmage Papers; italics Talmage's.

expressed my views. I believe I am willing to modify my views if the evidence indicated that my interpretation has been wrong.¹⁴³

His job was not to be open, honest, or even curious. His job was to protect the faith and proclaim its truth. He was to stand firm, and let the world change to suit him, not the other way around. Knowing that science could change, but believing God that does not, Smith trusted God.

The exchange between Sterling Talmage (with his father's blessing) and Joseph Fielding Smith illustrated the tension between the authority of those with and without education. Joseph Fielding Smith had finished the equivalent of two years of high school. James E. Talmage, though he was 14 years older and holding a Ph.D., was considered to be the subordinate to Smith, who had been called to the apostleship (by his father, church president Joseph F. Smith) a year earlier than Talmage in 1910, at the age of 34.¹⁴⁴

The order of seniority is very important. Russell M. Nelson, current (2019) church president explained, "Seniority is honored among ordained Apostles—even when entering or leaving a room," then told the story of a junior apostle who was "stuck" in a room until his senior finished the conversation and left.¹⁴⁵ One is expected to stand if someone of higher authority enters the room and to remain standing until the person of authority sits. Juniors (and members of the congregation) are expected remain seated at the end of the meeting until the highest authority stands. When seated around a table, apostles are seated in order of seniority

¹⁴³ Joseph Fielding Smith to Sterling B. Talmage, September 29, 1934. Sterling B. Talmage papers.

¹⁴⁴ This was a fairly common practice for a prophet to call a young son as an apostle, hoping they would outlive the others to one day become prophet. Most of them died young, though Joseph Fielding Smith ended up becoming the Church's oldest prophet to start his term at age 93.

¹⁴⁵ Russell M. Nelson, "Honoring the Priesthood" April 1993 Conference address.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1993/04/honoring-the-priesthood.p10?lang=eng>

and speak in turn (making it hard for more junior apostles to disagree). Nelson quoted Joseph Smith, saying he taught that “it is contrary to the economy of God for any member of the Church, or any one, to receive instruction for those in authority, higher than themselves.”¹⁴⁶ It would be seen as a major breach of etiquette for junior apostles to give advice to more experienced ones, and it was especially so for a lay person like Sterling Talmage to advise an apostle such as Joseph Fielding Smith, who, since the age of 34, believed he held all of the possible priesthood powers as Jesus himself and did not need to receive instruction from anyone but the prophet and a few senior apostles.

In addition, Sterling Talmage had been to the temple where, as part of the endowment ceremony, he would have made vows against “evil speaking of the Lord’s anointed.” Such a strong criticism could have put him in danger of excommunication had it been made publicly. Such subordination was a very bold act for a lay member of the church who valued his membership and shows how deeply important this issue was to him and other intellectual members of the church.

These incidents also demonstrate that James Talmage, as an apostle, was still willing to consider scientific evidence. He understood that one could not just ignore science that conflicted with belief and was willing to do what he could—while still following the rules—to make changes. When the rules would not allow him to speak up, he did so through his son. It is also clear that Talmage’s main concern was supporting the church and he was careful to maintain the appearance of unity among the Brethren, even when they strongly disagreed.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. This is the reason no man has to answer to a woman in the church--without the priesthood, all women are subordinate to all men who hold the priesthood.



Janne Mattson Sjodahl (1853-1939) was the sixty-nine-year-old editor of the church magazine, *The Improvement Era* at the time of the meetings. He was also highly educated. Before joining the LDS Church, he had earned a Divinity degree in London (1878) and had been a Baptist minister in Norway. He moved to Utah and joined the church in 1886. A

devoted apologist for the church, he was very interested in proving the Book of Mormon's authenticity through archaeology. Sjodahl, as previous editor of *The Deseret News* as well as *The Millennial Star*, the church's newspaper in England, was a member of the committee to create new footnotes for the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon.¹⁴⁷ He had also been part of the Book of Mormon geography meetings in 1921, an event that could be considered the precursor to the B. H. Roberts meetings. B.H. Roberts, Willard Young, Anthony Ivins, James Talmage, and Janne Sjodahl were all present in both the geography meetings in January 1921 and then one year later at the Moyle home meetings.

Sjodahl was born in 1853 in Sweden to Lutheran parents. At 16, he became a Baptist and enrolled in a Baptist seminary the next year. After serving as a minister for a few years, he moved to England and earned a degree in Divinity from Spurgeon's College in London in 1876. He then moved to Norway and was a minister there for the next ten years. In 1883, after four years of marriage his wife died in childbirth with their second child (who also died). Three years later he was excommunicated (along with two women) from the Baptist church on charges of

¹⁴⁷ The 1920 Edition of the Book of Mormon was not actually printed until 1921.

adultery. According to Bernt Lundgren, who wrote a BYU M.A. thesis on Sjodahl in 1971, his excommunication may also have been spurred by his association with the Mormon missionaries.¹⁴⁸ Following his excommunication, he decided to go to Utah and his young son died on the journey. In Utah, he was baptized into the Mormon church, remarried, and began making a name for himself.

Sjodahl was gifted at languages. He spoke Swedish, Norwegian, English, Greek, Hebrew, German, Icelandic, and Arabic. He was editor-in-chief of the church-owned *Deseret News*, until he was called on a mission to England in 1914. His second wife had died in 1910 and, as his biographer wrote, “problems occurred during the periods of his life when he had just experienced the loss of his wives... these problems were at least understandable, as one considers the weaknesses of human flesh.”¹⁴⁹ The death of his Norwegian wife led to his excommunication from the Baptist church on charges of adultery. This time, after the death of his American wife in 1914, he left the country quietly under suspicion of being the owner and patron of a “negro club” and brothel; or, at the very least, of being a negligent landlord.¹⁵⁰ Only Swedish newspapers reported his shameful property, it seems Utah’s English-language newspapers did not mention it. By the time the *Deseret News* announced that Sjodahl had resigned as editor on September 30, he had already been in England for a week, a journey that typically took ten to twenty days. Given that the reports of his connections with a brothel first appeared on August 6, Sjodahl made quick work of moving across the world.

¹⁴⁸ Bernt G. Lundgren, “Janne Mattson Sjodahl—Baptist Minister, Convert to Mormonism, Editor, Author, and Missionary,” (Master’s Thesis, Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 1971).

¹⁴⁹ Lundgren, 104.

¹⁵⁰ Lundgren, 55.

In England, he became editor of the British LDS periodical, *The Millennial Star*. While in England, he appeared to take an interest in Book of Mormon archaeology, writing several articles that gathered archaeological data to support its claims.¹⁵¹ He also frequently mentioned that the Book of Mormon had predicted the Civil War, which he saw as irrefutable proof that it was God's word. When he returned to Utah following World War I in 1919, his alleged indiscretions apparently forgiven and forgotten, he was put back to work on church publications.

In 1920 Sjodahl worked with apostles James E. Talmage and George F. Richards on the Book of Mormon committee that was tasked with correcting many of the grammatical problems of the original, as suggested by B. H. Roberts, as well as creating new footnotes for a new edition of the Book of Mormon. Part of that project was the attempt to map Book of Mormon geography.

Janne Sjodahl and James Talmage both recorded details about the meetings in their journals.¹⁵² Sjodahl's journal described his own fascination—but B. H. Roberts's discomfort—with new ideas about a limited-geography theory. At the meetings, three people presented theories.¹⁵³ Joel Ricks presented a traditional hemispheric interpretation that encompassed much of North and South America. Several years earlier, he had distributed at least six thousand copies of the map, though it was not officially endorsed.¹⁵⁴ It is likely that he had proposed this map be printed in the new edition of the Book of Mormon.

¹⁵¹This website lists all of the articles written about Book of Mormon archaeology: <https://stepbystep.alancminer.com/node/2282> (accessed May 25, 2019)

¹⁵² See Appendix B.

¹⁵³ Janne Sjodahl Journal, January 21-24, 1922. See Appendix B.

¹⁵⁴ James E. Talmage Journal, January 14, 1921.

Colonel Willard Young then presented reasons why the hemispheric model could not work and presented a limited-geography option based in Honduras. Sjodahl seemed most impressed with the third and final presenter, Anthony Ivins, who also presented a limited-geography model, this time located in Yucatan and Mexico.¹⁵⁵ The limited geography theory posits that the Book of Mormon events did not take place in the Western Hemisphere as a whole. Willard Young and Anthony Ivins argued in these meetings that descriptions in the text described journeys that would require superhuman speed and endurance to be possible with previous views. Consequently, they had to adjust their understanding of the geography and theorized that the events of the Book of Mormon took place in a limited area of Mesoamerica (about one thousand kilometers).¹⁵⁶

B. H. Roberts was uncomfortable with the limited geography theory because it would require disregarding a revelation written by one of Joseph Smith's scribes on the same piece of paper as a canonized revelation which said that Lehi landed in Chile.¹⁵⁷ Sjodahl wrote:

Elder Roberts said a great deal depends on whether this is revelation or not, and he did not see how that question could be decided offhand. The enormous distances to travel present a serious difficulty. Furthermore, that the contrast between the country Lehi came from and that into which he entered is not once mentioned is, to say the least, very singular. If we were free, the speaker said, from that alleged revelation, it would be easier to reply to adverse critics of the Book of Mormon.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ While this was the first time Mormons presented a limited-geography theory, RLDS intellectuals had begun exploring the idea several years earlier. See Terryl Givens, *By The Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 277 fn. 31.

¹⁵⁶ Dan Vogel and Brent Metcalfe wrote that this theory is the "last gasp of Book of Mormon apologetics" using "pseudoscience and specialized interpretations that cannot bear rigorous scrutiny"; that those who support it "embrace their theory like an article of faith despite the violence it does to the Book of Mormon text, early Mormon history, Joseph Smith's divine edicts, and Mesoamerican archaeology." *American Apocrypha*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), ix.

¹⁵⁷ Included in scripture as Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) 7.

¹⁵⁸ Janne Sjodahl Journal, January 22, 1922.

This quote shows Roberts finding “serious difficulty” with their assumed beliefs about the Book of Mormon and a touch of skepticism that one could travel to a new part of the world and not mention the contrast. Here, he was faced with a choice to discount Joseph Smith and believe the science, or to uphold Smith’s revelation and make an argument for miracles (that were not described as miraculous in the text, just everyday travels). A limited-geography theory would require Joseph Smith to be in error because on several occasions Smith had clearly identified the location of certain Book of Mormon battles in Western New York and other locations in the United States. This, on some level, likely spurred Roberts into examining his previous assumptions on a deeper level when he studied the subject again later that year.

In the end, according to Sjodahl’s journal, Roberts fixed on faith. He urged the group to remember that God had given them the book not for scientific purposes, but to remind them that Jesus is the Christ; so he doubted that anyone would be able to make an accurate map of Book of Mormon lands. He said there wasn’t sufficient data provided in the Book of Mormon to settle on one place in particular. The committee decided that until there was more definite proof, they would avoid making a decision on Book of Mormon geography. James Talmage later wrote of the meetings:

Somewhat over a year ago a committee of the Council of Twelve sat for days listening to the presentation of the subject of Book of Mormon geography by several of our brethren who have given particular study to the subject, and we found that their views differed as widely as the continents. It was there and then decided that until we have clearer knowledge in this matter, the Church could not authorize or approve the issuance of any map, chart, or text, purporting to set forth demonstrated facts relating to Book of Mormon lands. . . ¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ James E. Talmage to Jean R. Driggs, February 23, 1923, James E. Talmage Papers.

No map appeared in the 1920 edition of the Book of Mormon or in any subsequent editions. Footnotes that had been part of Mormon scriptures for 43 years that specifically identified North American locations (such as Lake Ontario and Western New York) were removed, possibly to make way for limited-geography theories.¹⁶⁰ Even today, “church leadership officially and consistently distances itself from issues regarding Book of Mormon geography in order to focus attention on the spiritual message of the book,” according to the church’s *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*.¹⁶¹ One hundred years after deciding to avoid making a statement on geography, “clearer knowledge” of the matter has not come.

Roberts and Sjodahl differed in their views of the Book of Mormon. Sjodahl had written an article for the *Juvenile Instructor* in June 1922 entitled “Book of Mormon Facts” where he claimed the Book of Mormon had predicted the rise of spiritualism and the use of “ouiza” boards. Roberts saved the article but wrote in the margin, “The article here in is of the kind that makes our Mormon argument contemptible.”¹⁶² Roberts felt that arguing for overly miraculous and magical aspects damaged credibility, especially for the more intellectual members, while Sjodahl felt the miraculous aspects were proof of its divinity.

In 1927 Sjodahl was one of the first Utah Mormons to publish a book on the limited geography theory. In *An Introduction to the Study of the Book of Mormon* he admitted expanding on a theory he had first heard advanced by Col. Willard Young, although his notes show that the one he adopted was closer to ideas proposed by Anthony Ivins, located in

¹⁶⁰ See Appendix C for 1879 examples of Book of Mormon footnotes specifically referring to North American locations.

¹⁶¹ John E. Clark, “Book of Mormon Geography,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Brigham Young University, 176. (accessed October 25, 2019) <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/EoM/id/5541>

¹⁶² This article was the clue that revealed that “bro. shrdall” in Lyman’s journal was actually Janne Sjodahl, which led to the second list of names of meeting attendees found in Sjodahl’s journal.

Mesoamerica.¹⁶³ For church members at this time, the footnotes in the scriptures they had been using for the past 43 years clearly indicated that the events of the Book of Mormon had occurred in the United States, and pertained more to the ancient (American) Moundbuilders, than the Toltecs, Aztecs and/or Mayans. Nevertheless, Sjodahl's book was widely distributed and became the foundation for much of today's limited geography theories, in time providing some pseudo-scientific answers to the "serious difficulty" faced by traditional views.¹⁶⁴

Sjodahl's major interest in the Book of Mormon was the intellectual challenge of proving its external claims. Lundgren wrote that Sjodahl's writings were often centered around the Book of Mormon, but that his approach was described as: "peculiar. His style and approach interested the young and those who had not done much personal reading in the Book of Mormon. Writing almost exclusively in the area of evidence for the book, he rarely entered into doctrinal interpretations."¹⁶⁵ It seems Sjodahl loved the puzzle more than the doctrine. He spent much of the rest of his life working on the puzzle and enjoyed finding pieces of archaeological data that might possibly fit.

Roberts and Sjodahl represented two types of approaches to the challenging information presented in the geography (and Moyle) meetings. Roberts would settle on faith, finding value within the pages regardless of whether or not the book was historical. Sjodahl would struggle mightily to keep the book valid in the physical realm, at times losing sight of the doctrinal value. Both types of approaches could be seen in the aftermath of the B. H. Roberts

¹⁶³ Terryl Givens, *By The Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 127. See Appendix for Janne Sjodahl diary of geography meetings.

¹⁶⁴ "Book of Mormon Commentaries" in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*
https://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Book_of_Mormon_Commentaries (accessed November 17, 2019).

¹⁶⁵ Lundgren, 91.

meetings and both would vie for superiority in the years that followed. By 1985, when Roberts's papers were published, it was Sjodahl's approach, refined over the course of decades, that would be used to make a defense.¹⁶⁶



James Henry Moyle (1858-1946) was 64 at the time of the meetings, and one of Utah's top lawyers; the first Mormon to leave the state for a law degree, at University of Michigan, in 1882. He founded Utah's Democratic party and twice ran for governor (1900 and 1904), losing both times. He was the first Mormon to serve in a federal subcabinet position, as assistant Secretary to the Treasury under Woodrow Wilson from 1917-1921. He had recently returned from serving in that position in Washington, D. C., when the meetings in question occurred. B. H. Roberts was also a dedicated Democrat, and Moyle helped Roberts get elected to Congress in 1900 (though Congress refused to seat him due to him being a polygamist). The two were likely close friends. Perhaps Moyle was one person outside of church leadership whom Roberts could trust with sensitive information while Moyle's position and eminence enabled him to host such a gathering as an intellectual (rather than spiritual) leader.

To the end of his life, Moyle maintained a friendly, yet sometimes critical, relationship with the church. He began his autobiographical notes by declaring that while he has been

¹⁶⁶ For defense, See John W. Welch and Truman G. Madsen, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?" (FARMS Preliminary Report 1985, P. O. Box 7113 University Station, Provo, UT 84602.), 2. See also John W. Welch, "B. H. Roberts: Seeker After Truth", *Ensign*, March 1986 and Truman Madsen, "B. H. Roberts after 50 Years," *Ensign*, December 1983. See also Foundation for Ancient and Mormon Research (FARMS) organization. For a defense of uncompromising position on historicity, See *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001).

bothered by many things, he was always able to see the good: “I will feel freer to say some things that does and had [sic] disturbed my mind, but thank God never soured it, and with His help nothing ever will. There is too much good in all good men to ever condemn them whole. It is that good which in the end counts and turns the balance in their favor.”¹⁶⁷ Several times his notes would say something critical, but he would follow up with reasons why he could be mistaken or a reminder of the person’s better qualities.

Moyle’s correspondence and journals have gaps during the years in question, but two biographies have been written about him, and he left a series of autobiographical notes near the end of his life. The first biography was unfinished and unpublished. It was mostly written during Moyle’s lifetime, but its subject died in 1946, and the author, John Henry Evans, died a year later. Moyle wasn’t entirely pleased with the job Evans was doing. He worried that Evans would not “tell everything,” so he made notes in a series of yellow notebooks to clarify things he thought needed more detail. One biography was based on Evans’s manuscripts and the other was based on these notebooks. Just as Moyle feared, neither biography told everything. Both biographies had some glaring omissions, including, but not limited to, the intelligentsia meetings Moyle hosted in 1922.

Gordon B. Hinckley of the church’s public relations department (and future president of the church) was given Evans’s unfinished manuscript by James Moyle’s son Henry, a newly-minted Apostle.¹⁶⁸ This biography was published in 1951 by a church outlet for wide

¹⁶⁷ Gene Sessions, ed. *Mormon Democrat: The Religious and Political Memoirs of James Henry Moyle* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), xxvi.

¹⁶⁸ Moyle’s son and church apostle, Henry D. Moyle was a forceful, dynamic, and difficult person, and his family refused to let his biography be published. Fellow apostle Marion D. Hanks reportedly said if a biography of Henry Moyle can “be done honestly, it probably should not be done.” (Poll Papers) Henry Moyle was a mentor for Hinckley, and it seems both of them would be interested in a perfected, more faith-promoting account of Moyle.

distribution. The other biography, written by Gene Sessions, was more transparent but was intended for a limited audience. It was based on the notebooks Moyle had written to clarify the Evans biography and included some extant letters and journal entries. First published in 1975, it was expressly “by and for members of the James Moyle genealogical foundation.” Even when it was printed in 1998 for Signature Books, the edition was “strictly limited to three hundred fifty copies” according to the title page.

In Sessions’s notebook-based (semi-auto) biography, Moyle related an incident to illustrate his distrust of his biographer, John Henry Evans, that also indicated the church’s concern over what kinds of things he might have to say. On March 11, 1943, Heber J. Grant, president of the church, invited Moyle to go for a ride in his car. During the course of this ride, Moyle confronted President Grant with the fact that Grant had asked Moyle’s cousin, Wilford Wood, to talk to Evans and inform him about “what I was saying in my history about the Church and the Brethren... I did not tell him that I was indignant at Wood because he had gone to Evans surreptitiously and not to me. The President merely and somewhat evasively admitted that Wood had acted in his behalf.”¹⁶⁹ According to Sessions, Grant admitted he was worried about what Moyle might have to say about apostle Joseph F. Smith as well as about the church’s interference in politics in favor of the Republican Party. Moyle was apparently someone who Grant felt had to be watched, with the potential of being a troublemaker.

Perhaps Moyle was proud of his ability to be a troublemaker. He wrote in his notebooks that he was humbled and proud to be called a modern Savonarola by an associate.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Sessions, 2, citing memorandum dated Mar 1943, James H. Moyle Papers Box 9, fd 7, Church History Library.

¹⁷⁰ Moyle Papers, Box 11 fd 3. Cited in Sessions, 30.

Savonarola was a priest who was hung and burned by the Catholic Church in 1498 for heresy, but who had actually gained the disfavor of the hierarchy for his denunciations of their corruption and malfeasance. Sessions specified that most of Moyle's opposition was in the political arena, but he was proud to have been willing to suffer and be denounced by those in power for the greater good. While he generally supported church leadership, he was also not afraid to tell them when they were wrong, especially when he felt that church leaders used their influence to sway politics (invariably in favor of the Republican Party).

Until the mid-twentieth century, Utah was considered a swing state, though as the church used more influence in favor of Republican politics, the Democratic Party's influence and success waned. Moyle, a Democrat, surely found this upsetting. President Grant, a former Democrat, had become a Republican during the Great Depression and was particularly unhappy when Utahns (Mormon and non-Mormon alike) voted to repeal prohibition and consistently voted to elect Roosevelt and support the New Deal despite Grant's outspoken appeals to reject them.¹⁷¹

Though Sessions's biography was less of a hagiography than Hinckley's, some seemingly important details were missing or glossed over in both published biographies. At least two important experiences in Moyle's life illustrate this problem: his visit to David Whitmer and the Book of Mormon historicity meetings. Both biographers had interesting ways of obscuring this part of Moyle's story, showing a clear bias in favor of the church over the complicated, faithful man whose biography they wrote.

¹⁷¹ Adam Brown, *Utah Politics and Government: An American Democracy Among a Unique Electorate*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 34-35

In the forward to Hinckley's biography of Moyle, was the following disclaimer: "If, with reference to a few controversial situations, the accounts herein set forth appear at variance with those generally understood, then it should be recognized that this is the light in which Mr. Moyle viewed these matters and he was an actual participant or an eye-witness to the events herein chronicled."¹⁷² With this, Hinckley asserted that his interpretation was the same as Moyle's, that if he clarified things for people, it was as Moyle would have wanted. However, it was clear that, at least regarding David Whitmer, Moyle had clarified the story himself. Hinckley told it in a way that was "at variance" from Moyle's records and recent testimony but seemed to believe Moyle would have approved.

Moyle's visit to David Whitmer was memorable. As Moyle was passing through Missouri on his way home after completing law school in June of 1885, he stopped to interview David Whitmer about his experiences as one of the three witnesses who claimed to have seen the gold plates fifty-six years earlier. Whitmer was an early member of the church and a close associate of Joseph Smith's, even living in the same home during the time that Joseph Smith was said to be in possession of the plates (before they were returned to the Angel Moroni after producing the Book of Mormon). Upon meeting the old man, Moyle put his newly acquired abilities as a lawyer to use as he cross-examined this witness.

While he found that Whitmer truly believed he had seen the plates, Moyle wrote in his journal that he was disappointed to discover Whitmer's description to be "unsatisfactory." The elder man was "somewhat spiritual in his explanations and not as materialistic as I wished...

¹⁷² Gordon B. Hinckley, *James Henry Moyle: The Story of a Distinguished American and Honored Churchman*, (based in part on the research and manuscript writings of John Henry Evans), (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1951), p. iiiv.

D[avid] Whitmer...did not handle the plates, only seen <saw> them.”¹⁷³ For Moyle, this lack of specificity was likely quite unsettling, as it would have been for any Mormon who believed the plates to be a physical reality rather than something that could only be seen with their “spiritual eyes.” While the beginning of Mormonism was full of folk magic and the occult, by Moyle’s time, most Mormons were (and often still are) unaware of this fact.¹⁷⁴

Historian Richard Kieckhefer wrote that “Magic is the crossing-point where religion converges with science, [and] popular beliefs intersect with those of the educated classes.”¹⁷⁵ Though Mormonism began with people who were using magic (though they viewed it more as science combined with religion), the folksy roots seemed increasingly embarrassing as Mormonism gained respectability and the church emerged from frontier practices. After the first few years, Joseph Smith avoided discussing the more magical aspects of the early years such as his “translation process” of reading words as they appeared on a rock inside a hat, while the plates were nowhere in sight (often said to be hidden in a log outside his home).

From the beginning, Smith had led people to believe that the plates existed in the physical realm. He kept something heavy in a locked box, allowing the Eight Witnesses who testified to the reality of the plates to feel the weight of the box, but relying on visionary experiences to see them. Witnesses were shown the plates by a “supernatural power,” something that would be unnecessary if they existed in the physical realm.¹⁷⁶ At that time and

¹⁷³ James Henry Moyle Journal, June 28, 1885- Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Punctuation in original. Also in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, Vol 5. (Salt Lake City, Signature Books, 2003), 140.

¹⁷⁴ For more information see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), xxii.

¹⁷⁶ See Dan Vogel, “Book of Mormon Witnesses Revisited,” <http://www.mormonthink.com/vogelwitnesses.htm> (accessed October 25, 2019).

that place in American history (Western New York, 1829), many people held the belief that spiritual seeing could be superior to—or at least as valid as—physical sight.

Moyle found his meeting with Whitmer somewhat unsettling. Both biographies mentioned Moyle interviewing Whitmer and quote other details from the journal, showing that it was referenced. Both biographies portrayed it simply as a faith-promoting experience. Neither biography mentioned his dissatisfaction. Neither mentioned the fact that David Whitmer reported that he did not handle the plates, only saw them, and that Moyle had been bothered by that detail.

In 1945, about a year before he died, Moyle recounted his experience interviewing David Whitmer to his local congregation. This address was also published that year in a magazine for the church's Sunday School organization. Moyle began by saying, "The Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's early life and work have always had a charm for me. They are the basis of our faith, and upon the divinity of that book rests the truth of our religion. If that book is not a divine record then we are a deluded people."¹⁷⁷ He recalled his meeting with David Whitmer, where he had "begged of him not to let me go through life believing in a vital falsehood. Was his testimony, as published in the Book of Mormon, true? Was there any possibility that he might have been deceived in any particular?"¹⁷⁸ While he found Whitmer to be absolutely convinced in the divinity of the book, Moyle admitted publicly to it his dissatisfaction:

There was just one thing I did not find satisfactory. I had difficulty then as I have now to describe just what was unsatisfactory. I wrote in my diary immediately on my return

¹⁷⁷ James H. Moyle, "A Visit to David Whitmer," *The Instructor*, vol. 80, no 9 (September 1945), (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union), 400.

¹⁷⁸ Moyle, "A Visit to David Whitmer," 401.

home, that in describing the scene in the woods he was 'somewhat spiritual in his explanation and not as materialistic as I would have wished.' That was my description then and I cannot make it any clearer now. He said, 'It was indescribable; that it was through the power of God.' He then spoke of Paul hearing and seeing Christ, and his associates did not, because it was only seen in the spirit... I have wondered if there was a special significance, not clear to me, in the language used by the three witnesses in their testimony referring to the golden plates, 'and they have been *shown* unto us by the *power* of God and not of man.' The eight witnesses say the plates were shown unto them by Joseph Smith. That I call materialistic, the other spiritual, and I could not get anything more out of it..."¹⁷⁹

Moyle had come to terms with the lack of physicality by drawing from the Bible and accepting that perhaps it occurred spiritually, though he still found it discouraging that the plates may not have been a physical reality but a visionary experience.

He went on to explain what reassured him about the sincerity of David Whitmer and the motivations of early church members. Moyle explained how growing up, he'd been told that Whitmer had become disaffected with the Church, so he asked him why he'd left the church:

His answer thrilled me more than any other statement which he made. It was the greatest surprise of the interview...he said 'I never left the Church. Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet of God and I accepted nothing revealed to him after 1835 because I did not know whether it came from God or Sidney Rigdon. He introduced into the Church many innovations. I have presided over a branch of the Church here in Richmond ever since the thirties.' [1830s] The surprise and thrill were due to the way he said it...The spontaneous expression of his thought—as if it came from the depths of his soul—"Joseph Smith was a fallen prophet of God" which spoke so impressively the most important fact that I was seeking. He could not have fallen if he had not been a prophet of God."¹⁸⁰

In the end, Moyle determined the Book of Mormon to be true because David Whitmer, who knew Joseph Smith as no other person during the production of the Book of Mormon, sincerely believed it to be true, even though he believed Joseph Smith to have become a fallen prophet

¹⁷⁹ Moyle, "A Visit to David Whitmer," 402.

¹⁸⁰ Moyle, "A Visit to David Whitmer," 403.

at some point. Whitmer maintained a branch of what he believed was the original version of Mormonism (Church of Christ-Whitmerite branch) and owned the original hand-written manuscript of the Book of Mormon, which he showed to Moyle.¹⁸¹

Moyle concluded that if there had been fraud involved, Joseph Smith would have been afraid of being exposed and would have kept Whitmer close rather than excommunicating him as he did. If there had been fraud, David Whitmer would have exposed it after being betrayed by Smith. This helped Moyle believe that early church members were at the very least, sincere, rather than knowingly tricking people. It was this part of the exchange, rather than Whitmer's account of seeing the gold plates, that reassured Moyle that being a Mormon was a worthwhile endeavor and not an intentional fraud. Perhaps he decided he'd take his chance on being one of the possibly deluded, yet sincere, people.¹⁸²

Hinckley carefully wrote about Moyle's experience with David Whitmer only as positive and faith-building, quoting from the journal, but ignoring his disappointment, even though Moyle had spoken differently about the situation just six years earlier. Sessions did the same, saying he had used the notebooks as his source, though no such notebook can be found at this time.¹⁸³ Sessions, who is still alive, admitted he had done so in an email: "My only excuse about the Whitmer interview is that I was using the yellow pads and what he said about it there is what you get in the book. You're right that I probably should have included, perhaps in a note,

¹⁸¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Whitmer (Accessed October 14)

¹⁸² That this account was published in the Church's Sunday School magazine was fascinating, as it was clearly before correlation began (officially in 1960), where a committee was formed to approve (or reject or censor) every piece of the Church's printed material from magazines to lesson plans. While Moyle felt he was confirming faith in the Church, talk of Joseph being a fallen prophet at any point and pointing out the lack of physicality to seeing the plates would never be mentioned in any church publication now.

¹⁸³ Sessions cites Box 10 fd 2 memorandum dated August 1943 as the source for Moyle's account, in addition to his diary, but I was unable to find his notes of this meeting. Church employees confirmed there was no such note.

reference to the more profound disappointment he expressed in his journal entry about the interview.” In his defense, he said “it does appear unedited in the collection of his writings I published in ‘View.’”¹⁸⁴ However, that book was written just for his family and is difficult to locate. It includes only the portion from his journal on that date, not the addition Moyle made in the “expense account” section of the journal where he is more specific about his disappointment and specifically states “D[avid] Whitmer...did not handle the plates, only seen <saw> them.” So, while Sessions may have been slightly more transparent in a limited publication for the family members, even then he did not recount Moyle’s full story. The more complex and nuanced account part seems deliberately buried, but not by Moyle.

There is some indication that Moyle himself was not always bothered by the interview and had told audiences that Whitmer had claimed to touch the plates. Hinckley included only one speech of Moyle’s in the appendix of the biography. This speech was given in 1908, and in it he said that David Whitmer claimed to have handled the plates as well as having become disaffected with the church, two things which the Moyle journal and later Moyle speech, the one given just six years before the book was published adamantly denied.¹⁸⁵ Moyle’s papers also contained the transcript of a radio address from 1927, with what appeared to be Moyle’s handwriting on it, where he also mentioned David Whitmer saying he handled the plates. Perhaps Moyle had misremembered the event for a portion of his life, at some point revisiting it in his diary and returning to the original story.

¹⁸⁴ The full title of this book is “A view of James Henry Moyle: his diaries and letters. From the James Henry Moyle Collection, the archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”

¹⁸⁵ In this speech, Moyle also spoke about Book of Mormon archaeology in Mexico and how the term “Mormon” is something to be proud of, so it pretty much covered all the bases that were especially relevant by the mid-century.

Both biographies also ignored the Book of Mormon historicity meetings held in Moyle's home. While it would be impossible to recount every aspect of a person's life, and perhaps they weren't actually very important to Moyle, Hinckley chose this period of the Moyle chronology to editorialize about Moyle's strong belief and devotion to the church, as well as his interest in Book of Mormon archaeology. This information could have come anywhere else, but its placement in the 1920s did suggest Hinckley was editorializing about Moyle's faithfulness at a time when the attorney was meeting fellow Mormon intellectuals about possible problems.

Oddly, at the same point in his biography, Sessions wrote that Moyle felt he was "under a cloud religiously" from the early 1890s to 1904, when he was finally recognized and made a high councilor in the Ensign Stake. As Sessions recounted, Moyle felt fully dedicated in 1929, when he was made President of the Eastern States Mission (two years after Roberts), at which point things became "clear sailing," and that being under a cloud had been "completely due" to his "outspoken opposition to what seemed to be the political (Republican) policy of the leadership of the church."¹⁸⁶

Sessions clarified this timeline in an email exchange where he admitted his inadvertent censorship of the Whitmer incident. He related that:

Moyle was so wrapped up in government service and Democratic politics in the early decades of the century that I sensed that his religious worries and even devotion took a back seat and didn't really stir back to life until his call to be mission president in New York. There is little doubt that he aspired earlier to become an apostle, so when that didn't happen, I sense that his activity slacked off, although his deep conviction did not. He talks about being 'under a cloud' religiously during those years, whatever that means.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Sessions, 171. Cites Moyle Papers box 10 fd 2, which did not appear to have such a statement.

¹⁸⁷ Gene Sessions, Email exchange April 18, 2019.

This would fit the timeline of a man who was questioning and struggling with his faith for a period as he worked through some difficult information, but who came through it revitalized. In the end, as evidenced by his Whitmer talk, he seemed to be unbothered by the idea of an inspired Book of Mormon rather than a physical one. He loved exploring archaeology and felt that the archaeological proof showed how inspired the book had been, that it was true and valuable regardless of its origins. Both biographies indicated that his time as a mission president was the most fulfilling time in his life, that he enjoyed being actively engaged in working to spread the gospel.

The Moyle biographies stopped short of giving a full, nuanced picture of the man, something Moyle feared might happen; but the effort to disguise his complexity is further evidence of the influence Moyle had. As someone who cared about the church but was willing to see faults and disagree with leaders, he was clearly a person in the right frame of mind and position for Roberts to turn to for help in finding answers to his difficult questions. He was strong enough to take a good look at the evidence without fear and he would have the courage to speak out if he felt the need, as he had often done in the political arena. His courage could inspire others, and his separation from church hierarchy meant that his livelihood did not depend on his willingness to uphold the church at all costs or be bound by a mandate to agree. He was as close as one could be to a neutral party, while still being considered an ally to the church's cause, a safe person with whom to share potentially damaging information as they sought for a way to make their faith both spiritually and intellectually sound.



Alice Dinwoodey Moyle (1865-1960) was known as a bright student, always near the top of her class, and was likely involved in the discussion during the meetings that were held in her home when she was 57. She was the mother of six children (four boys and two girls), one of whom (Henry) would become an apostle, known for bold (and sometimes unsuccessful) policies.

Her son's biographer, Richard D. Poll, described Alice Moyle as "more light-hearted and relaxed in her approach to life," than her husband, who was known to be strict at times, and opined that "she was probably responsible for some of the mellowing that her husband showed as their family increased." She was "a good but not meticulous housekeeper," showing that the drudgery of homemaking was not her top priority. She loved music and art and taught her children to do the same. Though her son would conform to the Word of Wisdom's prohibition on tea, Moyle "drank tea often and gave it to the children when they were sick."¹⁸⁸

Both Moyles enjoyed doing things with their children, according to Poll, and family prayer was something that happened on special occasions, usually if someone was in need of special protection, whether sick, having a baby, or going far away. Poll's inclusion of details such as tea drinking and not praying together on a daily (or even regular) basis subtly informed readers that the Moyle household was more relaxed than Mormon families were eventually expected to be, although they were probably normal in their level of outward devotion for the time.

¹⁸⁸ All quoted material about Alice Moyle is interviews gathered from Richard Poll, *Working the Divine Miracle: The Life of Apostle Henry D. Moyle*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 15-16.



Dr. Franklin Stewart Harris (1884-1960) was 38 at the time of the Moyle meetings. Only months earlier he had been appointed the first non-polygamous president of Brigham Young University (BYU) as well as the first president to hold the Ph.D. (in agronomy from Cornell). The trip to Salt Lake City from Provo takes about an hour with modern freeways and light-rail trains, so an extensive commitment of time and energy must have been required for Harris to make it to these evening meetings in 1922, after a day of work. His diary recorded making three trips to the Moyle home to discuss “Book of Mormon problems” in April, May, and June of 1922.¹⁸⁹ Because BYU is owned and governed by the church and is where education and church doctrine collide, the climate at BYU reflects the larger currents of Mormonism, especially when it comes to attitudes toward education. By studying the Harris presidency, much can be learned about Mormonism in the 1920s, including how the Roberts studies and Moyle meetings may have affected the intellectual atmosphere.

Harris had inherited a disaster at BYU. After the academic freedom controversy involving the firing of three professors who taught evolution and biblical criticism in 1911, there was a mass exodus of credentialed faculty. By the time Harris became president, only one faculty member at BYU held a Ph.D, while the University of Utah had twenty-three.¹⁹⁰ It was mainly a high school with some college courses, largely focused on teacher training, and was not an accredited institution. Programs leading to a bachelor’s degree in science were

¹⁸⁹ See Index for journal entries.

¹⁹⁰ Simpson, *American Universities*, 93.

discontinued in 1909 and had only recently been reinstated in 1920. The institution was constantly on the verge of being closed because the church was in the process of divesting itself of educational facilities rather than competing with state schools and focusing instead on seminary and institute programs that would impart spiritual knowledge and strengthen church ties.¹⁹¹

When Heber J. Grant became church President in 1918, things began to change. While Grant was not himself educated, he felt that education was important in the development of the people. Historians Gary Bergera and Ronald Priddis concluded that “although he regretted his own ‘depth of thought’ and ‘very limited’ education, Grant insisted that he was ‘not afraid of scientific facts or knowledge of any kind or description affecting the faith of the Latter-day Saints’.”¹⁹² He hoped that a university more in line with modern educational standards would dispel some of the remaining anti-Mormon hostility and bring respectability. Hiring Harris was part of this effort of bringing church members in alignment with the educational standards of the rest of the world.

Immediately preceding the B. H. Roberts meetings, the church had gained confidence in the trustworthiness of scientific inquiry and unfettered education. Evidence can be seen in a statement issued in 1921 by the First Presidency. It told church members that whether the stories in the Bible were historical or allegorical, as some “higher critics” have suggested, “it is of little significance.” The grand stories of the bible teach truth, and “the purpose and intent of

¹⁹¹ See Simpson, *American Universities* and Gary Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985).

¹⁹² Gary Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 49. Quoting from an address delivered at the semi-centennial celebration of Brigham Young University, 16 Oct. 1926, *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, 1926, p. 97

the book are excellent.”¹⁹³ This was remarkable, given that BYU teachers had been fired amid controversy in 1911 for saying similar things, and this statement was coming from the highest level of the church. Church leadership would have much more difficulty saying the same about the Book of Mormon, though people like Roberts would try to apply the same logic. This notable statement was an indication of this period of open inquiry and a willingness to reexamine previous ideas that just preceded the leadership meetings about Roberts’s papers. The fact that such a statement seems remarkable in retrospect is further indication of how much the Roberts meetings and their aftermath may have undermined church leaders’ confidence.

Franklin Harris presided over this period of intellectual flourishing at BYU. Under his leadership, BYU became an accredited university in 1928 (although it had been named a university since 1903). He hired five Ph.D.s during his first year and mandated that all professors hold at least the M.A. He implemented sabbaticals, encouraging professors to continue their education. He tried to attract new talent and promised that the university would stand for “academic freedom without any attempt to avoid issues.”¹⁹⁴ This would prove to be easier said than done.

Harris’s focus on academics included religious education. He felt that both aspects could be integrated. “We must make of this institution a great center of religious thought,” Harris announced, “and we must have in our library the leading writing on religious subjects from all

¹⁹³ Bergera and Priddis, *BYU*, 50.

¹⁹⁴ Gary Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985), 19

parts of the world”¹⁹⁵ He hoped to create a well-rounded religious education, not just promote Mormonism. By the mid-1930s, “of forty-one religion courses listed, only seven dealt with exclusively Mormon subjects, a decrease of nearly 50 percent from 1920.”¹⁹⁶ This short period of the 1920s to the mid-1930s was the only time such a broad religious education would be offered and encouraged at BYU. As church leaders felt more protective (a signal of insecurity) in the wake of the Roberts meetings, they became more nervous about outside ideas and forms of authority.

As much as Harris tried to champion academic freedom, there were limits. As a meeting attendee, he was aware of the Roberts papers. He clearly thought the information was sensitive because two professors in the religion department, George Hansen and A.C. Lambert, had been found in possession of “A Parallel” during the 1930s. According to Lambert: “George Hansen and I had some sketchy material about it, and were scolded by Pres. F. S. Harris for even possessing anything and were told to get rid of it, and not anyone does have anything in possession about it. [sic] We obeyed orders up to a certain point. George retained some typed sheets. I got nothing specific to retain.”¹⁹⁷ Lambert did not say where he got the papers, though a letter from George Hansen to H. Grant Ivins named Elsie Talmage (James Talmage’s daughter) as someone who had showed a copy to others.¹⁹⁸ Harris, undoubtedly aware of Roberts’s documents, was trying to keep the information from spreading, destroying it when possible. He

¹⁹⁵ Bergera and Priddis, *BYU*, 49.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁹⁷ H. Grant Ivins to Seth Shaw December 4, 1973, quoting a letter from Lambert. H. Grant Ivins Papers, Marriott Library.

¹⁹⁸ George H. Hansen to H. Grant Ivins, February 19, 1974. H. Grant Ivins Papers.

could also have been worried about his ability to protect teachers from what one teacher called an “inquisition” that was growing by the mid-1930s in an attempt to root out unorthodoxy.¹⁹⁹

As part of Harris’s focus on becoming a “great center of religious thought,” and in an effort to improve church education, several students were sent to the School of Divinity at the University of Chicago from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s.²⁰⁰ They were sent with financial backing from the church, with the stipulation that re-employment with the church was contingent on their continued faith and loyalty. Two divinity school students, Russel Swensen and Darryl Chase recalled a conversation with B. H. Roberts regarding their studies during a break in 1931. When Swensen told Roberts he was thinking about writing his thesis on a Mormon topic, Roberts’s sardonic remark warned: “Young man, don’t ever write a thesis on a Mormon subject; if you do, you’ll be cut off from the Church. Half the people in the Church would apostatize if they knew the true history of the church.”²⁰¹ This, from the man who had written the history of the church. By 1931, Roberts understood the delicate balance between faith and knowledge, investigating and ignoring, that was required for church members.

The experiences of the divinity school scholars further illustrated the tension between faith and knowledge as well as the awkward role of a religious scholar in a church run by lay clergy. While most of the students at the Chicago school would head congregations as a result of their studies, Mormon students had difficulty finding a place within the church. Of at least a dozen students who studied divinity, all but four “eventually left religious education for secular

¹⁹⁹ Bergera and Priddis, 55.

²⁰⁰ See Casey Paul Griffiths, “The Chicago Experiment: Finding the Voice and Charting the Course of Religious Education in the Church” in *BYU Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010), 91-130.

²⁰¹ Russel B. Swensen, Oral history, quoted in Griffiths, “The Chicago Experiment,” 103

academic and professional positions.”²⁰² Even then, one of those four, Heber Snell, was nearly excommunicated and was forced into retirement at the end of his career.

Snell became controversial for publishing a book about the history of the Old Testament that would appeal to all Christians, not just Mormons. In this book, he accepted a scholarly historical consensus that some books had multiple authors.²⁰³ Snell was also displeased that the richness of the Bible was being overshadowed by a focus on the Book of Mormon and wanted to help Mormons gain a greater appreciation for Biblical truths. He also believed that historicity was not the ultimate measure of truthfulness. In a meeting of LDS educators in 1937 Snell stated, “We ought to be governed in our judgements in internal evidence of the books themselves, and by such external evidence as may exist, rather than by mere tradition.” For those who believed tradition should be maintained, this statement was heretical. Though he was speaking about the Bible, which did not hinge on the LDS church’s prophetic authority, such a statement (in addition to a view that evolution may have been directed by God rather than animals being placed fully-formed on earth) shocked Elder Joseph Fielding Smith enough to warn the Church Commissioner of Education Franklin L. West: “If the view of these men become dominant in the Church, then we may just as well close up shop and say to the world that Mormonism is a failure.”²⁰⁴ It is no wonder Smith fought so hard against

²⁰² Russel B. Swensen, “Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School: A Personal Reminiscence,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol 7 no 2, 46.

²⁰³ For more on this episode, see Richard Sherlock, “Faith and History: The Snell Controversy,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, v 12 no 1, 27-41. Part of the reason this was a problem is that scholars believe there were two authors of Isaiah, one before and one after the exile. But the Book of Mormon quotes parts of Isaiah that scholars believe were written after Lehi would have left Jerusalem and therefore could not have been part of the Nephite records.

²⁰⁴ Joseph Fielding Smith to Franklin L. West, March 11, 1937, cited in Griffiths, 107.

change, when he assumed that adjustment in ideas would equate to a failure of the entire venture.

Some church leaders were pleased with the direction taken to advance knowledge in religious studies. Richard Lyman wrote Franklin Harris about the Chicago students, saying, “When we have more men who can associate with great scholars and can speak and understand the language of great scholars, the work of the Church will go forward much faster.”²⁰⁵ Moving faster, however, was not what most members of the church and the leadership wanted; in fact, it looked like failure to some.

“Outside” influence on religious ideas at BYU would quickly be frowned upon by leadership who felt that the “pure and simple” things of the gospel were becoming tainted by higher criticism and academic examination. Even Heber J. Grant, who had been supportive of academic freedom when Harris was hired in 1921, and had invited four non-Mormon educators to address General Conference in 1921 and 1922, would become dogmatic about the idea that Mormons had nothing to learn from the outside world, especially in regard to religion.²⁰⁶ In 1934, he warned church educators:

I want you all to understand that you are teachers and that you are in exactly the same position as missionaries who go out into the world to preach the gospel. They go out to teach and preach, and *not to learn the ideas and views of other people*. If we have the truth, and everyone in this body ought to have a testimony that we do have the truth, *we do not care what other people believe and what their teachings are*. The main thing that counts with the Latter-day Saint teacher is an individual testimony and knowledge of the divinity of the work in which you and I are engaged.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Richard Lyman to Franklin Harris, June 14, 1932. Cited in Simpson, 110.

²⁰⁶ Simpson, 190, fn 9. Non-mormons speaking in General Conference is extremely rare, and this may have been the last instance.

²⁰⁷ Heber J. Grant, “Teach What Encourages Faith,” 3-4. Quoted in Simpson,

This was quite a change from his insistence less than a decade earlier that he was “not afraid of scientific facts or knowledge of any kind or description affecting the faith of the Latter-day Saints.” Rather than an academic understanding and wrestling with the mysteries of religious faith, church leaders began to focus on simplicity.

J. Reuben Clark of the First Presidency warned church educators in 1938 that they would need to have the “intellectual courage” to stand with the truth—as possessed only by the Latter-day Saints —when “the findings of human research” would inevitably come into conflict with the truth.²⁰⁸ Intellectual courage had taken on a new meaning in the 1930s, reversing the academic gains of the 1920s. Church leaders at that time “departed from traditional Mormon teaching about the church’s ability to incorporate all truth, regardless of its source.”²⁰⁹

By the mid-1930s, Harris’s innovations were under attack. He spent much of his time fighting against the Board of Trustees who began to mistrust his commitment to academics over orthodoxy. In 1944, Harris resigned after twenty-four years at the helm. He was convinced that apostle J. Reuben Clark was “hedging up the way” for BYU’s future as a respected academic institution and resented being pressured to purge “heretical” faculty.²¹⁰ Harris took a job as the president of Utah State University in Logan, the state agriculture school that fit his education and gave him the freedom to lead that he no longer had at BYU.

Despite intense pressure, Harris never fired a teacher over lack of orthodoxy and consistently defended his faculty against attacks. “President Harris came closer to establishing a climate of academic freedom and operating a real university in the traditional sense than had

²⁰⁸ Simpson, 120. Citing J. Reuben Clark, “The Charted Course,” 244.

²⁰⁹ Simpson, 120.

²¹⁰ Bergera and Priddis, 15.

been true at any time prior to him, or since,” wrote Purdue sociologist Harold T. Christensen.²¹¹ Franklin Harris did his best to provide a place for people like himself and Roberts time to work out the apparent conflicts between intellectual and religious thought while remaining in the church. The flourishing of academia in the wake of the challenging information presented by B. H. Roberts led to an attempt to find answers, before orthodoxy ultimately triumphed.



Dr. Frederick James Pack (1875-1938) was forty-seven at the time of the meetings and a professor of geology at the University of Utah. He held a Ph.D. from Columbia and would become one of the most important voices as an advocate for integrating both faith and science in

order to strengthen both. He had been James Talmage’s assistant in the geology department before Talmage’s call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in 1911, at which point Pack became the head of the department. He later wrote many articles and gave talks on KSL, the local church-owned radio station, about the Word of Wisdom (the Mormon health code) and the relationship of faith and science.²¹² His knowledge about geology and the age of the earth was undoubtedly a reason he was invited to the meetings.

Pack’s life showed the interesting trajectory from frontier Mormon life to the modern day as he described in his wonderful unpublished autobiography.²¹³ This document showed the contrasts experienced over the course of a single generation and demonstrated why it could be

²¹¹ Bergera and Priddis, 54.

²¹² Mormons can thank Pack for incorporating Coca-Cola into the Word of Wisdom: Frederick J. Pack, "Should Latter-Day Saints Drink Coca-Cola?," *Improvement Era* 21:5 (Mar. 1918).

²¹³ Frederick J. Pack Papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

so difficult for many to find common ground between the present and the past. From ecstatic religious experiences in a small theocratic community to the scientific rationalism of the university, Pack had experienced the entire range. In his work, he sought to help both communities understand one another.

His mother, Mary Jane Walker, emigrated from England in 1852 when she was 17. The journey lasted seven months and she traveled alone. She was married within a month of her arrival in Utah, the fifth wife of a man who was twenty-six years her senior. When Mary Jane's mother arrived in the deserts of Utah a year later after an arduous journey of her own, she found her only daughter, just eighteen years old, with a new baby and married to a man her own age. To compound the issue, it was unlikely that either woman knew that polygamy was a Mormon practice before leaving England. Missionaries in England vehemently denied the practice of polygamy until 1853, even though some had up to a dozen wives at home.²¹⁴

Frederick Pack was his mother's tenth child, one of forty-three siblings from his father's eight wives. His mother had her first child at age 18; her last, the eleventh, at age 47. She raised them alone for the most part. Pack remembered his father coming home only occasionally; his father died when Pack was ten years old. Pack's autobiographical reminiscences of his childhood included the one time he swore ("oh hell" when he broke a shoe), an answered prayer at 9 years old (that brought back a lost horse), marrying his childhood sweetheart (the

²¹⁴ See "Three Nights' Public Discussion" published by John Taylor in Liverpool in 1850 (<https://archive.org/details/threenightspubli00tayl/page/n2>), wherein Taylor (who would become Church President in 1875) adamantly denies LDS practice of polygamy. At the time of printing, Taylor had twelve wives. After admitting polygamy in 1853, church membership plummeted from over 30k members (the rest of the world combined, including Utah, only had 21k) to 13k within a few years. Most left over polygamy and the cover-up. For more, see Myron Crandall Harrison, *Rescuing Beefsteak: The Story of a Pragmatic Pioneer Idealist*. (Jackson: Myron Harrison, 2018); Polly Aird, *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector: Scottish Immigrant in the American West, 1848-1861*, (Norman: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2009), 88.

one person he ever dated), and bringing his wife of a few days along as he went on a mission to Colorado.

It also included a rare detailed account of a prayer meeting just before leaving on his mission as a twenty-one year-old newlywed in 1896.²¹⁵ He was told by Apostle John W. Taylor that “if we would follow his instructions, he would promise us a testimony.”²¹⁶ After a ritual cleansing of house and body and fasting for an entire day, a select group of thirty to forty people met in the home of Sister Louisa Coltrin. After dinner, “some bore testimony of their knowledge of the gospel, while a few others merely express belief in its truthfulness.” After all had spoken, Taylor suggested they speak again. After a few had again expressed their testimony:

Patriarch Joseph Kynaston broke forth in an unknown tongue. We knew at once that the Apostle’s promise was being fulfilled. The spirit of God filled me like a flow of continuous lightning. At first my eyes were riveted to the floor, but later I regained sufficient control to look in the direction of the aged Patriarch. His countenance glowed with a brilliance comparable to that of the sun. It was physically impossible for me to look upon him for any protracted time. Then I understood why it is impossible for the natural man to look upon the face of God and live.

When he had finished, we sat for a moment in total silence. Then with an assurance, possessed only by one inspired of Deity, Apostle Taylor said to his wife, “Nellie, you have the interpretation; arise and give it.” She stood silent for a moment, asked for our faith, and then eloquently broke forth in an interpretation of what had been said by the Patriarch. The statement contained an exhortation to diligent performance of our labors; promised us success and warned us that we would be tested, tested, tested.” During the interpretation, I raised my head and looked toward the speaker, but as before, my gaze encountered a brilliance that was blinding in its brightness. I lowered my eyes and thanked God for his great kindness. We were all in tears. The Lord had

²¹⁵ Frederick James Pack, “A History,” 12. Frederick J. Pack Papers, Marriott Library.

²¹⁶ Apostle John W. Taylor (son of Church President John Taylor) resigned as apostle in 1905 and was excommunicated in 1911 for refusing to accept the polygamy ban and marrying more wives. Source: Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 72. He had a total of six wives and 36 children.

made good the promise of his servant. We knew of his existence and were prepared to go forward with renewed determination to bear testimony of Him.²¹⁷

Speaking in tongues was a common “gift of the spirit” of early Mormonism. Pack’s experience was a fascinating example of the practice, rarely described in such detail. Over time, the “gift of tongues” would be reinterpreted to indicate the ability for missionaries to easily pick up foreign languages rather than this type of spiritual outpouring.²¹⁸ For Pack, the spiritual ecstasy was still a rare but important part of the Mormon religious experience.

In 1906, ten years after that prayer meeting, Pack obtained the Ph.D. in geology from Columbia. By many accounts (including his own) his major contribution to Mormonism was the book *Science and Faith in God*, written just two years after the Moyle meetings. While he did not mention the meetings, or even Mormonism specifically, this book was possibly a way for Pack to process the tension between faith and science that the information in Roberts’s papers would have generated.

Historian Thomas G. Alexander wrote that “Pack’s major purpose seems to have been to disarm both the intransigent Fundamentalist and the crusading Modernist.”²¹⁹ The title page of his book says “two truths are never at variance” and his dedication page is “Dedicated to a Religion That Enables its Adherents to Accept All Truth,” a subtle reminder to his Mormon community that they have the ability to find and accept truth, that they don’t need to reject ideas that challenge them.

²¹⁷ Frederick J. Pack Papers, “History of Frederick James Pack,” Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²¹⁸ <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/gift-of-tongues?lang=eng> (Accessed October 16, 2019)

²¹⁹ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930*. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 300.

In the introduction, he described being raised in a devoutly religious home where he had learned to “believe implicitly in the realities of religion.”²²⁰ But when he reached college and was faced with certain scientific information, he started to think that the two viewpoints were not harmonious. He related what an awful experience that was:

The distress that came to [me] can be understood only by those who have had a similar experience. It is difficult to tell just what the outcome would have been if [I] had not had the good fortune to overhear one man say to another that two truths are never at variance and that in cases of seeming disagreement, difficulties always clear away when sufficient time is given to their consideration.²²¹

Rather than losing faith or shutting down thought, he allowed time to work things out and realized that working out the truth might take some effort.

Pack maintained that conflict arises between science and religion “when a theist believes that the basis of his faith is being attacked by the scientific conception of the operation of the universe... If the theist could overcome the sense of threat, he could just as easily overcome the problems with evolution and higher criticism as earlier religionists did with the Copernican universe.”²²² It is the sense of feeling threatened that is the biggest problem, according to Pack. When theists are inflexible and feel threatened, their position, as well as the faith of their followers, can be undermined if they fight against science and science is eventually proven right (such as with Copernican theory). The only safe position a theist can take would be that true scientific theories reveal the work of God.

²²⁰ Frederick J. Pack, *Science and Faith in God*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1924), p. viii.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints 1890-1930*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), p. 285.

Pack was a proponent of the harmony between science and faith. While retaining his faith in God, he wrote that biblical literalism was a problem. As an example, he showed his reader that Noah's flood story could not be literally true. In addition to the impossibility of an ark housing that number of animals, the flood itself was impossible. In order to cover the highest mountains, five miles above sea level, the rain would have to fall for 40 days at 25 ft/hr. The most severe storms ever recorded were scarcely one tenth of that volume and there was not enough water on earth to accomplish the task. To evaporate, even if the water had been boiling, it could not have disappeared in the time stated. But, he contended, that did not mean the story was useless. Most theologians looked for hidden truths to be learned through the account.

While Pack still believed in the authenticity and the value of the Bible, he also believed it reflected some outdated views because God presented it as people could understand it at the time. He wrote, "Deity cannot make complete explanations until the human mind has developed to the stage where it is capable of grasping the full truth."²²³ As human understanding grew through science, religion would become fuller, more complete, and more understandable, not less so; and that was nothing to fear.

Pack believed that God used laws, that nature proved God, and that there was universal truth. He wrote that the "proper conception of religion should enable the believer to accept truth wherever it is found."²²⁴ Faith shouldn't be harder to believe than science, and vice-versa. His final paragraph assured readers:

²²³ Frederick J. Pack, *Science and Belief in God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1924), p. 221.

²²⁴ Pack, 263.

Finally, the Christian can rest assured that the laws of nature will never be out of harmony with faith in God. Future developments of science may cause the believer to modify some of his present conceptions of religion, since his comprehension of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is necessarily an imperfect one, and therefore, subject to revision. The principles of religion, however, cannot change because they are eternal.²²⁵

Pack was assuring those who felt that the foundations of their faith had shifted due to the challenges of science that the foundation was firm, just being clarified through science.

Pack's work was highly respected by intellectuals in the church and was considered by many to be one of the most important books in Mormonism at its time. His autobiography reflected on the success of his book:

I sincerely feel that one of the biggest services that I have rendered to my state and to Christianity in general has been in assisting young people to understand that no conflict exists between religion, when properly understood, and true science.... My book was published in 1924, eight years ago. It has experienced a wide sale, and I believe, has accomplished such good. At the time of its publication, it was strongly praised by President Grant and others. Its content represents my spare-time effort of several years.²²⁶

He mentioned being praised by Grant and others. He could probably see that battle still raged (and in fact had increased, if the battles at BYU were any indication) for a settled understanding between those who wanted to reject science in the name of faith and those who wanted to allow faith to be flexible enough to incorporate science. Had he had the status of apostle, the book might have changed the course of thinking within the church; however, if he had been an apostle, it probably would not have been allowed to be published because the Brethren were divided on their stance toward science and reticent about taking any position at all (which over time was interpreted as anti-science). Nevertheless, for the intellectuals of the church, Pack's

²²⁵ Pack, 270.

²²⁶ Pack autobiography, Frederick Pack Papers, Marriott Library, Salt Lake City, p 104.

book had a welcome impact and provided a middle ground for those who wanted to believe in *both* science and religion without having to choose sides.

It was likely that Roberts found an encouraging ally in Pack when it came to devising answers for his questions. Pack's favorite quote, "Two truths can never be at variance" was likely spoken during the meetings, since it was a guiding principle in his life and had saved him from losing faith at a time when his belief was challenged. Pack believed that continued study would eventually solve any disagreement between faith and science. He also likely believed that physical proof of the Book of Mormon was unnecessary because, like the Bible, it could be true regardless of its plausibility in the realm of physical proof and historical accuracy. Just two years after the meetings where B. H. Roberts turned to the intelligentsia to find answers, Frederick Pack responded with a work that was important in teaching Mormons how to be open to change and encouraging intellectuals to hold on to their beliefs in both the physical and spiritual realms. By proving that the Bible could not be literally true but was still valuable, he was conceivably preparing Mormons to accept the idea that the Book of Mormon may not literally be true either.



Dr. Margaret Curtis Shipp Roberts (1849-1926)

was an obstetrician, mother of nine (only four lived to adulthood), and the favorite plural wife of B. H., though he was not the father of her children. She was one of a

very few highly educated Utah women in her time; the second woman in Utah to go "abroad" to be educated. She was seventy-two at the time of the meetings, and the image above was

taken just months after the Moyle meetings as they left for the mission in New York. Though he already had two living wives, Margaret and B. H. were married in her forties and his late thirties, she was seven years his senior.²²⁷ This was her second time being married as a plural wife (her first marriage ended around 1888).

Margaret and B. H. had a marriage built on mutual respect and intellectual compatibility, and she was the only one who accompanied him on his mission to New York in 1922, where the next year they married officially (civilly) after his first wife died. His obvious preference for her “created some trouble” with his other two families, though he kept having children with his other wives—fifteen in all.²²⁸ Margaret and B. H. Roberts never had any children together. By all accounts it was a good match, where they were intellectual equals, greatly enjoyed each other’s company, and played intense games of chess.²²⁹ Like the other women in the meeting, she was a strong, independent woman whose intellectual achievements were on par with the men in the room. Her inclusion in the meetings showed that her intellectual input was valued.

Because they married before 1904, they were not excommunicated, and their relationship was tolerated. They likely married after the 1890 Manifesto when Mormons were told to quit practicing polygamy, a promise the leadership did not try very hard to keep,

²²⁷ There is no date for the marriage because the two married after the 1890 manifesto which banned polygamy, so their marriage had to be kept secret at first and they had to lie, saying it had taken place earlier than it had.

²²⁸ John Sillito, ed., *History’s Apprentice: The Diaries of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), introduction.

²²⁹ Most of this information is taken from a biographical account written by a granddaughter, Noelle Neville Cardon, located on Family Search:

[https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/68443316?p=22145300&returnLabel=Margaret%20Curtis%20\(KWNT-TPH\)&returnUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.familysearch.org%2Ftree%2Fperson%2Fmemories%2FKWNT-TPH](https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/68443316?p=22145300&returnLabel=Margaret%20Curtis%20(KWNT-TPH)&returnUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.familysearch.org%2Ftree%2Fperson%2Fmemories%2FKWNT-TPH) (accessed October 1, 2019)

because they continued to secretly marry polygamously. When the leadership's secret practice of the doctrine they had disavowed was exposed in 1904 during the Reed Smoot hearings, the Second Manifesto was issued. This time the edict was enforced, and the church started excommunicating anyone who practiced polygamy after that time. For B. H. and Margaret, there was no punishment, as they had begun their arrangement when leadership had privately sanctioned polygamy while publicly denouncing it.

Margaret's life as a polygamous wife was an interesting one. She was married in 1866, three weeks after her mother's sudden death—and two weeks after her eighteenth birthday—to Milford Shipp. He was eight years her senior, twice divorced, and already married to Margaret's friend Ellis (who was eight months pregnant). Milford served two missions and married two more wives (18-year-old Lizzie Hilstead and 16-year-old Mary Smith) over the next several years, coming home long enough to impregnate his wives and take a new one. Margaret and Milford ended up having nine children, three of whom died before the age of six.

In 1875, Margaret was "called" by Brigham Young to go to Philadelphia for training in obstetrics. She left her six-year-old son and her nine-month-old daughter in the care of her three sister-wives. But her homesickness was too great, and she returned home, sending Ellis to take her place. For the next two years, she watched Ellis's three children while Ellis and Milford attended medical school. In November 1877, Margaret returned to school leaving her three children (8, 3, and 3 months), as well as Ellis's with their "aunt" Mary.²³⁰

²³⁰ When Milford finished medical school, he decided he would rather study law, which he did, then passed the bar exam, but never practiced law either. He did keep the title "Dr."

During her time in medical school she had a baby nearly every year, giving birth to three, losing two (at seven months old and one year old), and graduated while pregnant. As laws prohibiting polygamy became increasingly harsh, Milford was sent on missions to get him out of the country, while Margaret and her six children lived in her small medical office. The children watched each other while Margaret went on calls, tended to patients, and trained nurses. She divorced Milford around 1888 after twenty-two years of marriage, possibly to help him avoid prosecution for polygamy.

Several years later she met B. H. Roberts who was living in a boarding house rather than with his two families to avoid being charged as a polygamist. They fell in love and got married, some time between 1890 and 1893 (no exact date was recorded). According to Roberts's testimony during the Smoot hearings, neither of his other wives knew about the marriage until two or three years later.

When Roberts was called on his mission in 1922, it was Margaret who went with him. The next year, when his first wife died, he married Margaret civilly (to the disappointment of Celia, his second wife, who had been married to him for over 35 years, had borne him eight children, and had spent several years exiled in Colorado to protect him from prosecution). For Margaret, her years with B.H. were the best of her life. Her early adult life was marked by isolation: from her children, from her community, and from her husband. With Roberts, she had a companion (though his other wives could not say the same), her children were older and then grown; she was respected, loved, and surrounded by friends.

While her sister-wife Ellis Shipp has been celebrated in Mormon history, Margaret Shipp Roberts has surprisingly little written about her. Perhaps this is due to the fact that her sister-

wife Ellis had a similar story without the complications of a potentially embarrassing second marriage to a notable (and complicated) Mormon whose memory and work some hoped would fade into the dust of history.



Merry May Booth Talmage (1868-1944) was 54 at the time of the meetings. She attended with her husband, James Talmage, which likely meant that her opinion and insight was valued. Despite being the primary caretaker of their eight children, (her husband was known to sleep at the office for days at a time), Merry May was also very involved in the community. She was a suffragette, even delivering a paper in Chicago in the 1903 World's Congress of Women. In 1906 she attended the Triennial of the National Council of Women in Toledo.²³¹ Beginning in 1898 and lasting until her death, she was called as an aide to the General Board of the church's Young Woman Mutual Improvement Association (YMMIA), an organization for teens to young adults, where she served on many committees. For nearly two years, she was the editor of their magazine, *Young Woman's Journal*. Talmage was also very involved in her local ward (congregation).

An unpublished history written by her granddaughter Shannon Howells, found in Merry May Talmage's papers, told the story of how her grandparents married and gave insight into the confidence the Talmages had in prayer and revelation.²³² Merry May Booth was a bright student at Brigham Young Academy (the predecessor of BYU). She was finishing her teacher

²³¹ <https://sites.lib.byu.edu/special-collections/2017/06/12/merry-may-booth-talmage-journal/> (Accessed September 25, 2019)

²³² Merry May Booth Talmage Papers, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. and online finding aid: <http://files.lib.byu.edu/ead/XML/MSS1607.xml> (Accessed September 25, 2019)

training and was secretary of the Polysophical Society, the school's major intellectual and social club. When she met James Talmage, he was a young teacher who had just finished his education "abroad." Having finished his education and started a career, he believed it was time to get married and went to a cave in the mountains to pray about whom to marry. He prayed all day, and at the end of the day, he saw the face of a student of his, Merry May Booth. While he was impressed with his student, they did not associate outside of class and he did not tell her of his prayer.

Talmage waited several months until Booth graduated and started a job as a teacher in Kaysville. In February of 1888, he went to Kaysville to study the water of the Great Salt Lake and called on her. On their first formal date, he asked her to marry him. She was nineteen, he was twenty-five when they married several months later in June. They wrote letters throughout their lifetime, though there is a gap from March 1922 to January 1924 when the meetings occurred. He addressed her as "Maia," she addressed him as "father dearest."

They had eight children, Sterling, Paul, Zella (who died as a child), Elsie, Karl, Lucile, Helen, and John. In the earlier years of her married life, Booth Talmage remained at home to care for the growing family when her husband made numerous trips to the eastern U.S. or Europe either for the Church or to attend scientific and professional meetings. In 1924, when Talmage was called to England as a mission president, she and their two youngest children accompanied him. During their four years there, she organized and assisted the women as well as missionaries throughout Europe. She was clearly an energetic, intelligent, and capable woman whose insight and assistance were valued.

When Booth Talmage died on April 6, 1944, *Relief Society Magazine* carried a tribute describing her:

If one could measure love, one would doubtless find registered high on the scale the love inspired by Sister May Talmage... Countless are the neighbors, friends, relations, home helpers, missionary sons, and Church members for whom she did thoughtful and helpful deeds... She sought the truth always, and loved and strove for accuracy. Possessing wit and wisdom, she added brightness as well as inspiration to any gathering. She lived well-nigh faultlessly the precepts of the Gospel, and in very deed merited the title, 'Latter-day Saint.'²³³

Booth Talmage was respected by her husband and those around her. Her inclusion in this meeting was likely to bring inspiration and brightness as she was known to do, and those involved trusted her ability to help discern a solution. While most of the men in these meetings were married (with three wives in Roberts's case), most did not bring their wives. It seems that only the most educated and intellectual partners were invited to join, suggesting the Moyle meetings were not merely social gatherings and also that Merry May Booth Talmage was respected intellectually.



Dr. Richard Roswell Lyman (1870-1963) was a fifty-two-year-old third-generation apostle. His father (Francis) and grandfather (Amasa) had also been apostles. In 1918, when he received his call, Lyman became the second apostle with a Ph.D. (the first was James Talmage in 1911). He studied civil engineering at the University of Michigan and received a Ph.D.

from Cornell in 1905. He founded the engineering department at the University of Utah and

²³³ From the finding aid for the Merry May Booth Talmage papers: files.lib.byu.edu/ead/XML/MSS1607.xml

headed it for twenty-six years (before and after receiving his Ph.D.). He also became the last apostle to be excommunicated.

Lyman was a big part of the events surrounding the B. H. Roberts meetings. Though he was not part of the “official” committee tasked with answering the letter, he was clearly involved. He had assisted Talmage and Roberts in their initial efforts to answer Riter’s letter when he wrote to at least two friends, George W. Middleton and Ralph V. Chamberlain, whose answers to Mr. Couch’s questions are part of the *Studies* material. Middleton was lifelong friends with his wife, Amy Brown Lyman, and was also a meeting attendee.²³⁴ The Lymans and Middleton vacationed at least once with Frederick J. Pack, another meeting attendee.²³⁵

Chamberlain was at Cornell with Lyman, and both earned Ph.D.s within a year of each other.²³⁶ Chamberlain, a biology teacher, had been part of the academic freedom controversy at BYU in 1911 and ended up losing his job due to his belief in evolution. Lyman’s father, Francis, was on an anti-evolutionist committee that brought charges against the professors. At the time, Chamberlain argued that evolution was the part of creative process used by God, a belief that was radical at the time, but has been adopted by many church members and is no longer considered controversial.²³⁷

That Lyman still sought Chamberlain’s opinion on such sensitive matters as those raised by Roberts (despite his controversial reputation) showed Lyman’s aligned at least somewhat with Chamberlain’s. He was someone who was willing to think broadly and consider new ideas.

²³⁴ See George Middleton bio, page 100.

²³⁵ Frederick J. Pack biography, Frederick J. Pack Papers, Marriott Library.

²³⁶ Chamberlain 1904, Lyman 1905. Franklin Harris also had a Ph. D. from Cornell many years later.

²³⁷ Simpson, 79.

Chamberlain was a biology professor at Harvard during the time of the meetings, or perhaps he would have been involved in the Moyle meetings as well. Lyman urged Franklin Harris (BYU President) to offer Chamberlain a job as part of Harris's plan to turn around the school's reputation a decade after the original controversy.²³⁸

It was a letter to Lyman for which Roberts created the document "A Parallel" in 1927, enumerating the uncanny similarities between the Book of Mormon and *A View of the Hebrews*. It was Lyman's (perhaps flippant) reply—that perhaps they shouldn't look into the problems if they were not going to help solve the ones they already had—that so grated on Roberts. Such a reply could make Lyman seem intellectually closed, but Lyman was more likely just overwhelmed by the problems and sought to answer the first ones before adding to them. Though they were bothersome, Lyman continued to consider the challenges raised in Roberts's studies.

As an apostle, Lyman, too, was bound by his duty to support the church and agree with the others, though he was known to be practical and less dogmatic than some of his peers. He felt that it was important to be flexible about what characterized a "good" Mormon. He wrote in 1929, "Perhaps the most important matter discussed [at a meeting of the Twelve] was my appeal for greater charity toward our church members whose views are not strictly orthodox. I say if 100 of the most successful church members are being pushed out of ward activity if not out of the church, then there may be something wrong with the leadership somewhere."²³⁹ He hated to see educated people feel unwelcome in the pews and felt that the church should try to

²³⁸ Simpson, 96.

²³⁹ Richard R. Lyman, Diary, January 7, 1929. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

hold onto good people who were less strict in their interpretations. He was reported to be warm and amiable, “unusually approachable and affectionate for a General Authority”²⁴⁰ (which probably said as much about other General Authorities as it did about him).

Lowry Nelson, an acquaintance of Lyman’s, in a letter to H. Grant Ivins, son of Lyman’s fellow apostle and Moyle meeting attendee Anthony Ivins, wrote about the pressure the apostles felt to conform:

Whatever his secret beliefs, the man has to play the role expected of him, which is to conform to everything handed down from ‘above.’ It is the same if a liberal were made an apostle. He soon shapes himself to fit the mold. You know Richard R. Lyman tried to escape the mold, but he couldn’t. Of course, his marital deviation was the immediate cause of his downfall, but there were ideological problems.²⁴¹

Nelson seemed to sense that Lyman’s “ideological problems” could have contributed to the public way in which Lyman was exposed and excommunicated. Nelson then recounted a personal conversation with Lyman in which Lyman told him about confronting John Widtsoe (a fellow apostle) about the intellectual weakness of his beliefs:

He also told us of chiding John Widtsoe about something he had said (I don’t recall what it was), but RR [Richard R. Lyman] said to him; “Now John (and pointed to a photo of the Amer. Society of Engineers) you can’t look those men in the face and say what you have just said to me.” And so on. It was quite a revelation to me.²⁴²

It was clear to Lowry Nelson that there had not always been harmony and agreement in the Council, as well as literal belief, though they tried to make it appear that way.

Lyman broke that mold, not by changing the beliefs of the other apostles, but by his “marital deviation” in 1943. He has the distinction of being the last apostle to be

²⁴⁰ Dave Hall, “A Crossroads for Mormon Women: Amy Brown Lyman, J. Reuben Clark, and the Decline of Organized Women’s Activism in the Relief Society,” *Journal of Mormon History* Vol. 36, no 2, (Spring 2010), p. 239.

²⁴¹ Lowry Nelson to Grant and Edna Ivins, November 8, 1971. H. Grant Ivins Papers, Marriott Library.

²⁴² Ibid.

excommunicated.²⁴³ For a believing Mormon, especially one with his visibility, it was quite a spiritually violent act. He was excommunicated for “breaking the law of chastity” by being involved in an adulterous relationship. Eleven years later, he was rebaptized but was not restored to his previous position. Lyman felt little remorse at first and felt that the whole thing had been a big misunderstanding.

It had come about because Anna Jacobsen, the woman with whom Lyman would become intimate, had been excommunicated in 1921 due to her role as a polygamous wife. While polygamy had been sanctioned and even required at times in the past, anyone who married polygamously after 1904 was excommunicated. Though she claimed at first that the first marriage had taken place before 1904, Jacobsen had not arrived from Denmark to Utah until 1905 and had begun living with her first husband in 1907. During the investigation into their relationship, her husband confessed in order to avoid excommunication and moved to Arizona. Jacobsen was excommunicated. Lyman was asked to counsel Jacobsen; to help her repent and return to membership. During counseling sessions over the next several years, they grew fond of each other, she got rebaptized, and they remained friends. In November 1925, Jacobsen expressed sorrow that she, in her fifties, would not be able to find a companion at this point and would be alone for eternity, since she was no longer sealed to anyone.

Lyman suggested that Jacobsen could be sealed to him, once one of them died.²⁴⁴ Such an arrangement would have been completely fine with church officials, as there was no

²⁴³ An excommunication removed him from membership and canceled his priesthood and temple blessings, including the sealing to his wife in the afterlife.

²⁴⁴ Gary James Bergera, “Transgression in the Latter-day Saint Community: The Cases of Albert Carrington, Richard R. Lyman, and Joseph F. Smith, Part 2: Richard Lyman.” *Journal of Mormon History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Fall 2011), 197.

problem with polygamy in heaven. Church policy allowed (and still allows) men to be sealed to multiple women in heaven, though women can only be sealed to one man.²⁴⁵ Many women have been sealed post-mortem to men to whom they had not been married in life. The only problem was that in 1938, after thirteen years of chaste meetings and considering one another prospective spouses, he returned from two years of serving as president of the European Mission and their relationship became sexual. In a confession, Lyman wrote that “the long separation and the fiery nearness of her being my prospective plural wife... led to a temptation I did not resist.”²⁴⁶ Lyman had not waited for the afterlife to begin the relationship, and privately kept the relationship going for at least five years. “Someone has said,” he wrote his former colleagues, “If a man has not done anything for which he ought to be ashamed or sorry he is not a very bad man.’ I hope this is the case with me. Can I ever be forgiven for saying that?”²⁴⁷ He did not feel remorse and continued the relationship for several years after he had been caught.

Even though Lyman and Roberts were only thirteen years apart in age, the contrast of the two relationships demonstrated how much the church changed and how punitive it became over the course of a generation. The way Lyman was exposed and excommunicated was quite hurtful to Lyman, was publicly embarrassing to both Lyman and the church, and seemed politically motivated.

²⁴⁵ *Church Handbook of Instructions*, (LDS Church, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1998), page 72, “Sealing Policies”.

²⁴⁶ Lyman, Letter to Stephen L Richards, November 12, 1949, typed excerpts in Quinn Papers. Quoted in Bergera, “Transgression,” 198.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

On November 11, 1943, Lyman, who was in his seventies, was discovered in the bed of his secret “plural wife.” It involved a police chief smashing down the door, without even knocking, of a seventy-one-year-old woman during the night. Lyman was brought outside in the November night in his (sacred) underwear in front of police and “others,” then brought by police to the church office building as if he had committed a crime, not a sin. There, he was given less than ten minutes to explain himself. A notice was placed on the front page of the *Deseret News* the next day.

This entire operation was spearheaded by apostles (namely J. Reuben Clark, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Harold B. Lee), and involved civil rather than just ecclesiastical authority. Normally such a thing would have been handled privately in offices involving confessions rather than coercion. Even the police chief later admitted he would never have been involved had he known who he was going to get; he had only been told there were going after a “Big Shot.” As a friend of Lyman’s, he always felt bad about his part in the debacle.²⁴⁸

Lyman was deeply hurt by the actions of men he had considered friends and felt he had not been given a fair chance to explain his situation. In a letter written to the Quorum in November of 1949, six years after the incident, he wrote:

I feel as if I had no trial. I think I was in the presence of the Brethren fewer than ten minutes. Brother Joseph Fielding said “We desire to give this serious matter as little publicity as possible” then came that terrible publicity the very next day that was read all over the world. My Michigan classmates (and I had been made president for life of the class of ’95) heard it everywhere. My engineering friends, some of them the greatest engineers in the world, began discussing it.

Does it not appear to you to have been a strange way to treat a friend after being in session with him all day under such conditions that at the slightest whisper he could have been held and he would gladly and quickly have explained his conduct. I say does it

²⁴⁸ Richard Lyman to Melvin Lyman, February 16, 1963, Quoted in Bergera, “Transgression”, 197.

not seem to have been most unkind to have sent after him, not an automobile full but a bus as large as a streetcar full of armed officers who split and [s]mashed down the door as if they were endeavoring to capture the worse [sic] kind of wicked armed and fighting criminal.

This episode showed the contentious conditions that had developed among the hierarchy in the years following the B. H. Roberts meetings. It seemed to be the final shot in a war of the conservatives (Clark, Smith, Lee) against one of the last remaining liberals (Roberts, Talmage, and Ivins had all passed away). While the conservatives had enough information to simply excommunicate Lyman, the public humiliation showed an extra level of viciousness that demonstrated a deep division in the supposedly supportive and unanimous quorum. This disagreement had been building for years, deepening from the time of the B. H. Roberts meeting until the ultimate triumph of those whose goal it was to shut down intellectualism and questioning within the quorum, at BYU, and in the church as a whole in their possible attempt to protect the church from the information such as that which Roberts presented.



Amy Brown Lyman (1872-1959) was fifty years old at the time of the Moyle meetings. She was on her way to becoming the most influential woman in the church. A church magazine article characterized Richard and Amy as “intellectual and spiritual equals,” when they met in 1893.²⁴⁹ During the time of the meetings, he was an apostle and she served on the Relief

Society General Board, which was the women’s organization in the church. She eventually

²⁴⁹ “Amy Brown Lyman: Eighth General President of the Relief Society, 1940-1945.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/callings/relief-society/relief-society-presidents/amy-brown-lyman?lang=eng> (accessed September 30, 2019).

became the General Relief Society President in 1940—the highest office a woman can hold in the church.

The meetings happened during a golden period for Mormon women. While they had recently emerged from polygamy (many of their parents had been polygamous), they still had the voice they had been allowed as the (acting) heads of their own various families. (Even in polygamy, when the father was often absent, he was recognized as the official head of the family. He just did not have the ability to control his large family to the extent that the father of a single family does). The fact that three accomplished women were present at the 1922 meetings showed that at this point, (some) women's voices were valued and they were being let in on some of the difficulties and allowed to be part of the solution.²⁵⁰ In 1922, the Relief Society was still an autonomous organization where the women did their own fundraising, controlled their own budget, produced their own magazine, appointed their own leaders, and ran their own programs. By mid-century, the entire program would be placed under the direction of "the priesthood." Women would then take direction from above and lose control of their organization.

Amy Brown was a remarkable person. As a child, her ability to get things done and move forward confidently earned her the nickname "Ready, Aim, Fire."²⁵¹ It was said that even her walk was so swift, purposeful, and intimidating that she "could part a crowd merely by walking towards it, even when she was well into her eighties."²⁵² She had dreams beyond the hearth

²⁵⁰ For more information on the polygamous women's relative independence (and neglect) during polygamy see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Women: Plural Marriage and Women's Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835-1870* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 2017).

²⁵¹ Dave Hall, "Anxiously Engaged: Amy Brown Lyman and Relief Society Charity Work, 1917-45." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 27, no 2. (summer 1994), 74.

²⁵² Ibid.

and home, writing to a friend shortly before her marriage in 1896 that she was feeling somewhat hesitant about “the event” (marriage), stating, “I want to see & hear a few more things before I sink into oblivion.”²⁵³ Though she married and had two children, Amy did not sink into oblivion, but her expectation that she would showed that this was what she perceived as the normal and expected path.²⁵⁴

While her husband was enrolled at Cornell for graduate studies in 1902, they stopped for a summer session at the University of Chicago. There, she enrolled in a course on the relatively new subject of sociology, a field which would fascinate her and guide her activities throughout the rest of her life. She learned how to apply scientific approaches to understand and resolve societal problems, a reasoned and practical approach to problem-solving that appealed deeply to her. Amy Lyman met Jane Addams and visited Hull House as part of the course and she spent time volunteering with Chicago Charities. She would say later that “she felt that during these days in Chicago a curtain had been drawn from her mind.”²⁵⁵ She would draw on inspiration from that experience for the rest of her life.

In her autobiography, *In Retrospect: The Autobiography of Amy Brown Lyman*, she writes that “No work could be more important and satisfying than that of helping to raise human life to its highest level,” which is accomplished by “relief of existing distress [and] prevention of new distress.”²⁵⁶ The efforts of her entire life exemplified this belief. She ended

²⁵³ Amy Brown Lyman to Will Hayes, 24 Feb. 1895, 1a, original in possession of Barbara Carlson. Quoted in *ibid*, 76.

²⁵⁴ Her children were born 1897 and 1909, twelve years apart. That she only had two children, one at a time, rather than the nine or more children most of her contemporaries had freed her up for outside pursuits. She also raised a granddaughter after 1925, when her daughter-in-law died. Her son died of suicide nine years later.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 77.

²⁵⁶ Amy Lyman Brown, *In Retrospect: Autobiography of Amy Lyman Brown*, (Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1945), 61.

up becoming one of the most important and influential women in the history of the church, organizing and leading many of the Relief Society's social services as well as facilitating increased cooperation between community and church efforts to provide relief to impoverished and struggling people. She served in the Utah State legislature from 1923 to 1924 and was an officer in the National Council of Women. She was an officer in the Relief Society starting in 1909 at age 37, and served as president from 1940 to 1945, when she resigned amid the scandal of her husband's affair.

Unfortunately, her legacy is largely unknown and vastly under-acknowledged because of the public embarrassment her husband caused the church, and probably in part because of the church's embarrassment over the way it was handled. Despite the major impact they had during their service, neither of the Lymans are part of the current Mormon consciousness, though he was eventually rebaptized and she was always a member in good standing. Historian Dave Hall believed: "Sadly, the discomfort Richard's excommunication caused the church eventually obscured not only his own contributions, but those of Amy as well. Thus one of the most important figures in Mormon history remains largely unknown to the present generation."²⁵⁷ Though she was one of Mormonism's most dynamic women, her contributions have not been properly appreciated.

Ever the stubborn, head-strong woman she was, Amy refused to divorce Richard, which was a radical move. Women in her situation were encouraged to leave their spouses, at times even risking official church sanction for refusing to do so.²⁵⁸ Despite being "prostrated" and

²⁵⁷ Hall, "Anxiously Engaged," 90, n65.

²⁵⁸ Bergera, "Transgression," 194.

“crushed” in the wake of the public outing, she “still loved Richard and knew that he loved her.”²⁵⁹ She told family members that “in every other way he had been an ideal husband and father” and “she was not going to leave him now.”²⁶⁰ According to Hall, family members and her secretary were also aware of the fact that the two had separate bedrooms, and it was rumored that Amy had told Richard in 1909 that they were done having children and that they would be living platonically. Hall wrote that it was even rumored that Amy was aware of the relationship and that the three had dinner together on Sundays.

Given that Amy was the twenty-third of her father’s twenty-five children from three wives, perhaps this arrangement had felt quite acceptable, even normal. Perhaps it was a relief for such a busy woman to delegate an aspect of her relationship to someone who was happy to do it. Or perhaps the rumors were a way to make Amy part of the problem, sharing in Richard’s guilt. Perhaps the reality was a combination of all those factors.

This entire event was interpreted (and possibly orchestrated) by many to make the Lymans the primary exhibit of what happened if women ignored their primary duties of wife and mother and had the audacity to lead. Women in the past had been encouraged to be highly involved in community work and activism. The Relief Society, a voluntary, dues-paying organization, had been seen as a parallel organization to the church, managed and run exclusively by women. But by 1945, LDS men had started to become apprehensive of the power women exercised. Historian Joyce Kinkead wrote:

Amy Brown Lyman’s life serves as a bridge between the “radical” church of early Utah and a twentieth-century conservative church. Perhaps she had been too successful in

²⁵⁹ Dave Hall, “Amy Brown Lyman and Social Service Work in the Relief Society.” (M.A. Thesis. Brigham Young University, December 1992), 168. Quoted in Bergera, 194.

²⁶⁰ Bergera, “Transgression,” 194.

her work for the patriarchal church. As president of the Relief Society, she was instructed to “simplify work of organization and reduce number of activities taking women from their homes”; up until that time, women had been encouraged to take an active role in the social welfare of their communities. Gradually, the financial power of the Relief Society decreased as church authorities took over much of the work and treasury that had been the province of the women.²⁶¹

The person who led this charge was J. Reuben Clark, a man who had spent nearly his entire career in government in Washington D.C., or as a U.S. Ambassador in Mexico, and had been only marginally active in the church until 1925, just eight years before he became the second-most powerful man in the church. In a very unusual move, he was called as a counselor in the First Presidency by Heber J. Grant in 1933, before he was even made an apostle (church presidents generally selected their counselors from the Quorum of the Twelve). By 1940, when Amy Lyman took the reins of the Relief Society, Heber J. Grant had suffered a stroke and David O. McKay, the other counselor, was experiencing health problems, so J. Reuben Clark was doing the majority of the work of the First Presidency and had restricted others’ access to the church president. His decisive, top-down, authoritarian leadership style was often called dictatorial, in contrast to Amy’s consensus-driven, participatory, and delegating one.²⁶²

In March 1940, just a month after Grant’s debilitating stroke, Clark called the Relief Society presidency into a meeting with the leaders of several other auxiliaries in order to discuss a memorandum he had written. In it, he had called for a reduction of what he saw as “unnecessary activities,” aiming to realign the programs of the Church. He asked the Relief Society to give up its broad agenda focused on educational work and leave that to other

²⁶¹ Joyce Kinkead, ed. *A Schoolmarm All My Life: Personal Narratives from Frontier Utah*. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 160.

²⁶² Ibid

community agencies while they focused instead on “the promotion of faith and testimony.” He called on them to assume their rightful position as the “handmaid of the priesthood.”²⁶³ Clark also proposed discontinuing the *Relief Society* magazine and combining it with the children’s publication. Lyman was able to resist this proposal thus keeping LDS women’s voices alive for thirty more years until they were ultimately shut down in 1970 by Clark’s protegee, Harold B. Lee.²⁶⁴

Amy Brown Lyman became the last Relief Society president to enjoy broad control of her fundraising, budget, agenda, and educational curriculum. During Lyman’s time serving with the Relief Society, the position of the president changed from a life-long one, such as those of the Apostles, to one where the church leadership decided the terms. When Belle Spafford took over after Lyman’s release, it was a position with less latitude and independence. However, as Dave Hall pointed out, perhaps Spafford, who was a generation younger than Lyman, did not feel the same compelling need for collective activism, like so many others, whose suffragist mothers’ actions had embarrassed them. The chaotic decades of the Great Depression followed by World War II had brought a craving for home and stability for many Americans, the kind a “settled home life seemed to represent.”²⁶⁵

Lyman was the last of her kind, as well as the first. Having grown up under polygamy but not practicing it herself (at least knowingly and/or publicly), she was accustomed to the independence (or neglect) that had been a part of the culture of polygamy even as LDS

²⁶³ J. Reuben Clark, “Memorandum of Suggestions,” quoted in Hall, “Crossroads” 232.

²⁶⁴ The magazine was canceled as part of the correlation program, where everything in print had to be approved by a committee of priesthood brethren.

²⁶⁵ Hall, “Crossroads,” 248.

authorities directed greater scrutiny toward women who were the only wives. Perhaps the patriarchy felt a greater need and ability to control women when there was only one wife to fulfill all wifely obligations. In this atmosphere, Amy Brown Lyman became a negative example; a lesson about what happened when a woman became successful and focused on activities outside her own home, even if she was doing good for the church and community.



Dr. Andrew Affleck Kerr (1885-1929) was head of the archaeology department at the University of Utah and thirty-seven at the time of the meetings. He had returned only months earlier from Harvard, where he had been awarded the Ph.D. According to Sjodahl's journal, Kerr was slated to make a presentation at the next Moyle meeting on "the trend of American Archeology during the last 50 years." The next meeting, captured in Lyman's journal, did not list Kerr as an attendee. While it is possible that Richard Lyman forgot to mention his presence in the journal entry (Franklin Harris is not mentioned in this entry either, but Harris's own journal mentions going), it would seem odd. Had he been lecturing, Kerr would have been memorable; a big part of the meeting.

Quite likely, Kerr did not show up to the second meeting to give that presentation. As it turned out, in practice Kerr was not a great archaeologist and probably was not keen on people finding that out. Possibly he was intimidated by the intellectual capacities of those present at that meeting and the great significance their conversation had to their community. As the only archaeologist in the group, it seems likely that many of the issues would beg for his clarification,

one he likely felt quite incapable of giving. Whether or not he felt like an imposter, as an archaeologist, according to a later report, he seemed to be one.²⁶⁶ His no-show at the meeting could give the impression that he knew he was a terrible archaeologist.

As a young schoolteacher from Ogden, Kerr had accompanied Dr. Byron Cummings of the University of Utah on several summer archaeological digs.²⁶⁷ When Cummings left in 1917 during an exodus of disgruntled non-Mormon faculty members, Kerr was recruited to fill his place. Kerr went to Harvard in his mid-thirties to get the required education, where he was awarded the Ph.D. in Anthropology 1921. In 1924, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. He was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Anthropological Society of Harvard University, and the Archaeological Institute of America.²⁶⁸

During summers from 1924 to his unfortunately premature death from cancer at the age of 44 in 1929, he made five trips to southern Utah for archaeological digs. The expeditions yielded over 1500 artifacts that provided the University with a “prestigious collection of objects for display and made President Thomas very happy,” according to a 1984 report written by Winston B. Hurst for the State of Utah, Division of State History, Antiquities Section.

This report detailed Kerr’s archaeological work and observed that “in light of Kerr’s seemingly impeccable scholarly credentials and reputation, his field methods were inexplicably

²⁶⁶Winston Hurst, “The Kerr Collection Study: An Archaeological Tale of Woe, And A Study of Burial-associated Anasazi Ceramics from the Westwater Drainage,” pg. 6-7. Knight Belnap Kerr Papers.

²⁶⁷ Knight Belnap Kerr Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

²⁶⁸ Honors named in Hurst report. Harvard confirmed his Ph.D. in Anthropology and the Royal Anthropological Institute confirmed his membership.

slipshod.”²⁶⁹ Hurst bluntly wrote that “Dr. Kerr made no meaningful contribution to archaeology” and did incredible, irreversible, and continuing damage to the archaeological record and practices in southern Utah. The detailed report concluded that Dr. Kerr was a disaster as an archaeologist. The report was accompanied by a letter also written by Hurst giving the details to Kerr’s nephew who was trying to honor his ancestor.

Knight B. Kerr had written a letter in defense of his uncle to Hurst, highlighting kind words that had been spoken of Andrew Kerr after his death. In a letter written to Knight B. Kerr on Feb 26, 1987, it was easy to see how Hurst felt about Kerr and the legacy he left; a note so stunning that it is worth reproducing:

Your Uncle Andrew was indeed a good man, and highly respected...There is however, a tragic side to Andrew Kerr’s legacy, the consequences of which have been brutal and destructive to the archaeological record in San Juan County. Despite his impeccable academic qualifications, his membership in scholarly societies, and his skill as a teacher, he was a disaster as a field archaeologist, even for his time... To my unending amazement, your uncle never documented even a specific site for any one of his approximately 1500 museum quality artifacts collected from San Juan County. I have never found a shred of evidence for even a cursory note of field documentation, or any attempt at a map, any concern for stratigraphy, or any thought for archaeological association or context...the one photograph that I know of from his half-decade of collecting in San Juan county is the one that you graciously gave me showing two men churning the burial area of an unidentified ruin...even the untrained cowboys of Colorado’s Wetherill family, who did much damage to our sheltered cave sites during the 1890’s, kept records in which they assigned numbers to the sites, drew sketch maps showing artifact locations, and so forth.

I think the explanation lies in the nature of his interests and his academic training at Harvard. He apparently focused on humanities and classical studies, and received little or no education in American (anthropological) archaeology, and had no meaningful interaction with those members of the faculty and student body who were involved in American archaeology. Unfortunately, humanists and classicists had (and have) somewhat of a collection-oriented, almost antiquarian view of archaeology.

²⁶⁹ Knight Belnap Papers, “The Kerr Collection Study: An Archaeological Tale of Woe, And A Study of Burial-associated Anasazi Ceramics From the Westwater Drainage.” by Winston Hurst. Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. pg 6-7.

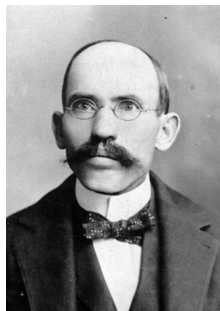
I feel no compulsion to air old laundry...but I am compelled to tell this story honestly, because it is so crucial to an understanding of the pothunting problem here. The families which have done the most damage to the archaeological record in southeastern Utah were trained by Andrew Kerr, Harvard PhD [sic] and University Professor...That your uncle failed to make even the most rudimentary effort at archaeological documentation is amazing and inexplicable, given his academic background and the state of archaeological methodology of his time...

Your Uncle Andrew is an enigma to me. I think I understand him, and have tried not to portray him as an ogre. I have to conclude, however, that he was either ignorant or contemptuous of the objectives and methods of his profession in his time, and that his activities left us a disastrous legacy down here....I'm sorry if it's an embarrassment to the family, but there is little that I can do about that, except to try to balance my story with clear reference to Andrew's many positive qualities.²⁷⁰

Perhaps Andrew Kerr had learned to conduct digs by accompanying Dr. Byron Cummings, had been offered the job at the University of Utah contingent on completing a Ph.D., but had not actually gotten the education he had been sent to get. Even if he had gotten the quality education he had been offered, it appears that he did not put any of the proper principles to use.

As for the Moyle meetings, it appeared that Dr. Kerr was invited as Utah's foremost expert in archaeology, showed up for the first one, was tasked with presenting a lecture about archaeology at the second, and did not show. It is possible that Dr. Kerr was unable to attend the May meeting and postponed his presentation until June, at which point he presented a brilliant synopsis of American archaeology for the past 50 years, putting everyone's minds at ease, and they called off all future meetings. Because there are no records, it cannot be proven otherwise, though Hurst's conclusions suggest skepticism of such an outcome.

²⁷⁰ Winston Hurst to Knight B. Kerr, February 26, 1987. Knight Belnap Kerr Papers.



Dr. George William Middleton (1866-1938) was a “nationally recognized” physician and surgeon.²⁷¹ Aged fifty-six at the time of the meetings, he was the close lifelong friend of Amy Brown Lyman. His biography also mentioned taking a trip with the Lymans and Dr. Frederick

Pack, so he was personally connected to several people in the meetings. He was considered somewhat of an authority on Book of Mormon archaeology, at least according to Richard Lyman, who asked him and at least one other person (Ralph V. Chamberlain) in November of 1921 to help him figure out a way to reply to Mr. Couch’s questions. A copy of his reply is published in *Studies*, and one can assume that he shared similar insights during the Moyle meetings.

He began his letter by saying that Mr. Couch was “certainly some student” but: “if he had been a real critical reader of the Book of Mormon text, he could have raised questions much more difficult to answer.” Was this to say the questions were easy for him to answer, or was it to say the Book of Mormon was a deeply problematic text? In the relatively short letter, Middleton provided some rather vague answers about how languages change (without concentrating on the time it took), cited a book that claimed Native American similarities to Hebrew culture and an encyclopedia entry stating that horses lived on every continent during the early age of man, and he could see no reason for them to go extinct- maybe the Spaniards forgot to mention them. He then performed some mental gymnastics, writing that the term steel is modern and is modified iron, so what was probably used was a type of modified iron

²⁷¹ Roberts, *Studies*, 39.

that had been mis-named in the text. Iron, at least, had been in existence since 1000 B.C. (in Europe).

Middleton went on to respond similarly to other questions. He provided some history of the “scimiter” but could not explain why it would be in the text. As for silk, there were a few other species of worms that produce silk for cocoons, but they were not used because the traditional (Chinese) ones proved so superior. Perhaps, he reasoned, some native peoples “learned independently” to make silk from the inferior cocoons: “I give the suggestion for what it’s worth.” He then wrote, “My dear friend I have given your letter considerable study, both because I would like to accommodate my friend, and because I have a particular liking for prying into such things and weighing them up in cold-blooded logic.”²⁷² His letter was a good example of the way intellectual Mormons generally handled the problem, finding sources that supported their ideas and satisfied them enough to put the question to rest, believing he had done so with cold-blooded logic. Few researched deeply enough to end up with 141-typed pages of material as Roberts had.

Perhaps the Moyle meeting changed things for Middleton, because he seemed less confident of Native American origins in his memoir than he had in the letter to Lyman. Like Dr. Pack, he believed one could reconcile science and God and attempted to do so in parts of his biography, but in a way that seemed personal. Middleton never mentioned Mormonism, and didn’t seem to be trying to persuade anyone to a reconciliation between religion and science. He just explained his own views.

²⁷² Roberts, *Studies*, 39.

He wrote that like every “intelligent” student, he found himself wrestling with reconciling religious dogmas to science. While it started in high school, the phase of wrestling with those paradoxes didn’t stop but “went on through my teaching and college career; and in fact has followed me into the retreat of retired old age.”²⁷³ He was not pretending to have worked it all out but he had come to realize that such a process was important:

Now, in my experience, I have come to think that the happiest people in their religion are the ones who do not think, but accept things on authority without any questions...As I pursued my religious thoughts further I eventually came to realize that if everyone had lived by blind unquestioning faith, the world would have made no progress. There are revolutionary times when old creeds are shaken to pieces, and new ones must appear.²⁷⁴

He believed this questioning and shaking things to pieces was a good thing. He discussed the life-cycle of a religion; how it starts dynamic, with fire and excitement, but as ardor cools, elements of weakness are integrated into the system. The official class gains social and financial advantages and “exert their influence” which begins to “sap the spiritual vitality of the system”:

Eventually, the early simple spirituality is superseded by a complexity of organization, which honest people put forth in a conscientious effort to keep their system potent in the face of accumulating indifference among the people. But a complex machine is harder to keep going than a simple one, and every new feature that is added, instead of being any permanent help, adds that much more to retarding the process. Finally there is a revolution, We need our Savonarolas and our Martin Luthers to correct the errors of the ages.²⁷⁵

Applied to his own Mormon experience, it seems clear that Middleton felt the machine had become overly complicated and a revolution was going to be needed at some point.

²⁷³ George Middleton, M.D., *Memoirs of a Pioneer Surgeon*, (Salt Lake City: Publisher’s Press, 1975), p. 59.

²⁷⁴ Middleton, 64.

²⁷⁵ Middleton, 65.

He wrote that his discussion was not an attempt to discredit religion, because it had done a lot of good in the world and had filled the human heart with hope during the darkest times. He clarified, “I discuss religion from a standpoint independent of all men’s creeds, and review the proposition of God and immortality from another and a different viewpoint than the usual one.”²⁷⁶ He didn’t mention Mormonism in particular, and in fact, claimed to be independent of all creeds. The nearest he got to professing a spiritual belief was devoting an entire chapter to the miraculous, orderly, God-affirming miracle of the human body. From the way joints work to the existence of eyelashes, he felt that it was too perfect to have been left to chance, that it was clearly designed by a brilliant creator.

He gave his opinion on Book of Mormon archaeology without naming it specifically. While recalling a trip to Mexico in 1923 with Richard R. Lyman, almost certainly inspired by the information they encountered in the Moyle meetings just one year earlier, he wrote: “Whatever science may prove or conjecture about the people who built and occupied this slumbering city, I think the evidence is indisputable that they were a pagan race, given to the worship of serpent-gods and other vagaries. The same may be said of all the other ruined cities I visited in Mexico.”²⁷⁷ It was clear he did not believe that earlier inhabitants of central Mexico were descendants of Israelites who built temples to a distinctly Christian deity, as the Book of Mormon taught. As if to prove his disbelief, he spoke about trying a beverage containing alcohol (forbidden in Mormonism) while on his trip to the consternation of some of his friends.

²⁷⁶ Middleton, 243.

²⁷⁷ Middleton, 254.

He clearly did not believe the Book of Mormon was proved by the existence of Aztecs and Mayans as so many of his colleagues such as James Moyle or Janne Sjodahl did.

Middleton wrote about taking a trip to the Grand Canyon with the geologist Dr. Frederick Pack and a Dr. Kelly, who was a devoted scriptorian²⁷⁸ and a very religious person. Middleton described watching Dr. Pack as he explained the geology of the canyon, with its visible layers of history, “his mind reaching far beyond the purported six thousand years since creation into the hundreds of millions of years, as he read the cipher of this great volume of earth history. I know that Dr. Kelly, great scriptural scholar as he is, was not willing to accept Archbishop Usher as the time-keeper of world events.”²⁷⁹ For Middleton, there was just too much evidence in the modern world to accept the old primitive explanations. Even Dr. Kelly, as much as he believed in the scriptural accounts, could not deny it.

Middleton’s views of politics overlapped his view of religion. He believed the brief period after the ending of polygamy in Utah was the best time in their history, politically. Local party politics that had centered on pro- and anti- polygamy gave way to national party politics. People began to study and decide for themselves which national party best represented their own aims, before choosing a party and sticking to it. As people were making this decision, there was less division and more thought. But that didn’t last long, he said: “unfortunately we had to degenerate and become like the rest of the world.”²⁸⁰ He was unhappy about the thought

²⁷⁸ It seems the word “scriptorian” is a word only Mormons use, meaning someone who is very familiar with scriptures. Other religions use “biblical scholar” to describe their scriptorians. It is purely a self-selecting group, as there is no theology or divinity school for Mormons.

²⁷⁹ Middleton, 278,

²⁸⁰ Middleton, 69.

control that happened in politics where success depended on orthodoxy. According to Middleton:

To be orthodox often means to lose one's own freedom of thought. The platform of the party is handed down to the individual member with the inference implied, if not expressed, that it contains one's thoughts ready-made, and that one must conform to them, or lose prestige as an advocate of the party. I did not last long as a politician because I was not willing to think in the political way.²⁸¹

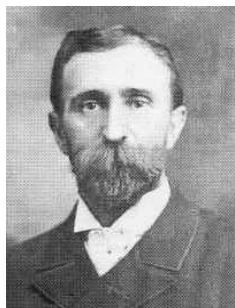
Orthodoxy had become a negative thing to Middleton. Although he was speaking of political parties, orthodoxy is a word often associated with and required by religion. Given Middleton's willingness to entertain iconoclastic opinions, one can't help but think he would have said the same thing about his religion.

The letter written before the meetings contrasted with the later views expressed in his memoir, showing the meetings had had an impact on this member. Earlier, he had cited Hebrew origins of Native peoples as fact, he later believed they were pagan. In his autobiography he seemed to think that organized religion was for people who did not think as broadly as he did, but his earlier letter showed he thought himself a superior thinker to the questioner as he defended his religion. He had been invited to gather as one of Mormonism's eminent thinkers, but did not acknowledge his affiliation with Mormonism in his memoir, only saying he saw things from a standpoint independent of all creeds. A trip taken just a year after the meetings to examine Mesoamerican archaeological sites showed that several members of the group were still ruminating on the questions and hoping to find answers. It appeared that during this trip, he found answers, but not the ones he had been hoping to find just two years earlier in his letter defending the Book of Mormon. His biography was published almost 40

²⁸¹ Middleton, 71.

years after his death, in 1975. It may have been shelved until those who knew him as a member of the church had died and could not make those comparisons.

George Middleton seemed to show the clearest evidence of stark before-and-after positions following the Moyle meetings. Just months before the meetings, he had been a strong and supportive member of the church, one of the top intellectuals tasked with finding a defense. By the time he took a trip to Mexico the next year, it seems that he no longer held orthodox views and, in the end, likely resented the expectation of orthodoxy. Rather than Middleton making an impact on the ideas surrounding Book of Mormon historicity, the ideas made an impact on him.



Dr. Charles Ludvig Olsen (1856-1923) was someone who valued knowledge enough to make great sacrifices to achieve it. His dedication to both the church and intellectual growth qualified sixty-five-year-old Charles Olsen to participate in the meetings. Perhaps he was simply good friends with some of the people and was admired for his intellectual abilities. His handwritten autobiography ends just one year before the meetings and he died one year later, in 1923; so his autobiography does not give any insight on the meetings but does give insight to his character.²⁸²

One passage from his autobiography exhibited the sharp mind he possessed, even at a young age. He wrote of a time when he was nine or ten and had been playing with marbles on a hill, when he lost his favorite large marble. Though he looked until it got dark, he could not find it. Lying in bed that night, he had the idea that if he rolled a similar marble from a similar place,

²⁸² Charles L. Olsen Autobiography. Church History Library.

it might land near the first. His autobiography explained the reason his successful experiment had such a lasting effect:

Happy? I guess. Well, what about that trifling incident? This: I had, unwittingly, and without help of a tutor, reasoned from cause to effect- which is a mental accomplishment indispensable to real success in life. This same line of reasoning has been of great service to me on hundreds of occasions since then.

While he was happy to have found his marble, the greatest joy was the pride in realizing that he could solve problems with his intellect.

Olsen's family joined the church in Norway 1861 when he was nearly five years old.

Because of "inordinate zeal" to live the Gospel, his parents did not send the children to school, a violation of the law in Norway. They objected to their children being taught the state religion in school. Olsen wrote: "Father, having lost all interest in anything pertaining to "Babylon," was determined to do all in his power to prevent his children from absorbing the sectarian notions of the world or becoming contaminated with the wicked, no matter what the consequences."²⁸³ Fear of the wicked world meant that Charles was deprived of a standard education, though he taught himself to read and eventually an older brother, who had some schooling, acted as his tutor. He would later recall that it was remarkable what he had been able to do with so little education.²⁸⁴ He also attended a weekly English class led by Mormon missionaries on winter nights, in preparation for their eventual emigration to God's kingdom—Zion—in Utah.

The appeal of Zion was indescribable. Though they lived in one of the world's most beautiful countries, Olsen wrote that God helped them care little for their home, making it easier to leave. He wrote of the utopian ideals Utah held for converts: "When young in the

²⁸³ "Autobiography of Charles Ludwig Olsen," FamilySearch.org, accessed October 18, 2019.

²⁸⁴ "Autobiography of Charles Ludwig Olsen," 4.

Gospel, father was very sanguine about everything pertaining to Zion...every fiber of his being, as it were, responded to his yearning for a place on this sinful planet where a consummation could be possible of all which the Gospel in its grandeur comprehended. Zion was that place. If not, where could such a place be found?"²⁸⁵ It would be worth any sacrifice to go to a place where righteousness was honored in such a fallen and sinful world, and they saved every penny toward the cost of travel to Zion.

Olsen's father, Christian, and older brother left their family in Norway in 1869 and traveled to Utah, hoping to send money for the rest to emigrate shortly.²⁸⁶ When Christian arrived in Utah it did not meet his other-worldly expectations. He was surprised by the primitive living conditions, the shockingly crude language, and the disappointment he felt that the "Hope of Israel," the "true-born sons of Zion" seemed to be "away below the children of Babylon in point of outward exhibition of piety or even in ordinary, humane regard for the dumb brutes and beasts of burden." After sacrificing so greatly to go to Zion, Olsen's father was appalled to find that in many ways, it was worse than home and that the people were not special or even good. When Christian saw this, "it helped cool his fever considerably."²⁸⁷ Though he was no longer fanatical in his devotion, Christian Olsen maintained his faith in the teachings of the gospel.

Two available letters in the Church History Library showed depths of Olsen's faith and the sacrifice he (and his wife) made for their religion. In 1891, Olsen was called on a mission to

²⁸⁵ "Autobiography of Charles Ludwig Olsen," 4.

²⁸⁶ Another older brother and older sister left in the few preceding years. Charles, his mother, and four siblings stayed in Norway, joining the others four years later.

²⁸⁷ "Christian and Christine Olsen in the Autobiography of Charles L. Olsen." FamilySearch, pg 9. <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/memories/KWCW-1J7> (Accessed October 25, 2019)

Scandinavia. With only four months to prepare, he would be expected to go to Scandinavia for an undetermined amount of time (probably around two years) while his wife stayed in Utah with the children. Neither would receive any financial assistance. He wrote a letter asking for more time to prepare, saying he was “financially in an embarrassing condition at present with family of small children (four in number alive, the oldest 7 ½ and the youngest at 1 ½,) still I feel that the Lord is able to open up ways and provide means.” The next week, (June 3, 1891) he wrote another letter thanking them for the offer to take as much time as he needed, but that he would be accepting the call, and leaving as asked in October, placing his faith in God that it would all work out.²⁸⁸ This separation lasted two and a half years, his youngest child was born while he was gone.

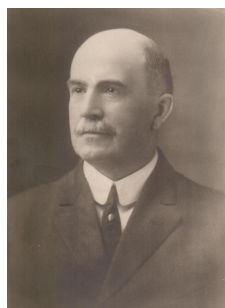
When Olsen returned in January 1894, it was a depression year and he could not find work. One can only imagine the family’s desperation after so many years without a steady income, his wife raising the children alone. They decided to endure three more years of separation, with the exception of visits home during the summer (where he would shear sheep to earn money), so he could attend medical school at the Eclectic Medical College in Cincinnati, Ohio, in September 1895. At the age of thirty-nine, he began his first experience in formal education. Just before starting his final year of medical school, his wife died four hours after delivering their eighth child, leaving him with seven children to care for, ranging in age from 13 years to four hours old. He found someone to care for his children during his final year and eventually remarried and fathered eight more children.

²⁸⁸ Charles L. Olsen to Wilford Woodruff, May 27 and June 3, 1891. CR 1 168, First Presidency Mission Calls, Church History Library.

Charles Olsen's life was one of struggle and deprivation, largely due to his dedication and sacrifice to the church. In spite of this, or perhaps because of those sacrifices, he loved the church. In his final years he wrote:

From childhood I was handicapped by a weakly physical, constitution, impecuniosity [poverty] and lack of systematic school training. In many other ways I have been subjected to inconveniences, and hindered in my struggle for a place in life at all suited to my fancy. But an indomitable inborn ambition has always goaded me onward. And how truly thankful I am to God, for bringing me to this goodly land, where it is possible, for anyone who is willing, to forge ahead and reach his or her desired goal—at least in a measure.²⁸⁹

Olsen made the best of every situation he encountered and endured many difficulties in his dual pursuit of faith and knowledge. His combination of strength, fortitude, faith, and intellectual capacity undoubtedly qualified him to be included in the Moyle meetings.



Colonel Willard Young (1852-1936), a son of Brigham Young, was seventy at the time of the Moyle meetings. He was interested in Book of Mormon geography and presented early ideas about a limited geography in the Book of Mormon geography meetings 1921. Trained in engineering, land surveying, and map-making, it may be no surprise that he had been one of the first Utah Mormons to calculate that distances described in Book of Mormon travels were much too small to include the entire continent. His expertise in Book of Mormon geographical content was valuable to the discussion, and his importance to the Moyle meetings was clear.

Willard Young was the first young Mormon to be educated “abroad.” The newly arrived transcontinental railroad made leaving the territory for education much easier than it had been

²⁸⁹ From the typescript of Charles Ludwig Olsen autobiography, pg. 62.

in years past. As governor of the Utah Territory, Brigham Young had the option of sending a representative from the state to West Point. In 1871 he chose his 30th child, Willard, a bright, strong young man. Willard's mother had died when he was six, and he was fostered by one of Brigham's other wives, Zina. When he graduated from West Point, the *Deseret News* reprinted an article from the *Chicago Times* of June 28, 1875 that read: "A son of Brigham Young has graduated from the military academy at West Point, standing third in his class. It has been said that polygamy results in the impairment of the mental faculties of the offspring, but this does not seem to prove the theory."²⁹⁰ Not only did Willard gain an education, he was able to reduce the prejudice many felt toward the Mormons, especially his classmates who liked and respected him.²⁹¹

Once Willard Young successfully managed to leave for school and maintain his faith, Brigham Young was willing to start sending other bright students to get educations that would assist in "building the kingdom of God." His top priorities were lawyers to help with his mounting legal troubles and female doctors to help with their dismal maternal healthcare (Margaret Shipp Roberts was the second one sent).

Part of Young's job as part of the Army Corps of Engineers was making detailed maps of Northern Utah and Southern Idaho.²⁹² As one of the only Mormons with such expertise, it seems only natural that he would approach the Book of Mormon with a special sensitivity to the geographical descriptions and distances mentioned. He was one of the first to be able to

²⁹⁰ Simpson, 17.

²⁹¹ Simpson, 16.

²⁹² Jenson, Andrew. *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Publishing Company, 1941) p. 417.

realistically gauge the distances into real-life measurements and realize that their previous beliefs would not work in real-world geography. He had demonstrated his ability to do so during the 1921 geography meetings, where Ivins, Roberts, Talmage, and Sjodahl were also in attendance. There can be no doubt that the conversations started in those meetings were continued and combined with other areas of expertise during the Moyle meetings in 1922.



Prof. George Oscar Russell (1890-1962) was 32 at the time of the Moyle meetings, the youngest member in attendance. He held the M.A. from Columbia at this point and would earn his Ph.D. in 1928. He was an assistant professor at the University of Utah during the time of these meetings. As a Columbia-trained speech expert, he was undoubtedly

invited to address the issue of the proliferation of native American languages, and whether or not they could all have originated from a single source, which was one of B. H. Roberts's biggest concerns. Unfortunately, his expertise was in the mechanics of speech rather than the way languages change over time, but he likely still knew more than most about linguistics.

He had been a professor of phonetics at Columbia from 1916-1917 then served in the Army from 1917-1919, where he worked for the Military Intelligence Division as general staff. After the war, he returned to Utah and was associate professor at the University of Utah from 1919-1923. He then went to University of Chicago as a visiting professor and did not return to work in Utah for almost 20 years. After three years in Chicago he moved on to New York, Ohio, and Washington, D.C. Though he has papers at Gallaudet University, they seem to be almost exclusively related to his work in speech pathology, and information on Russell was hard to

find. A few letters in other collections, however, showed Russell to be a troublemaker in the name of orthodoxy.

The first was mentioned in Bergera and Priddis's book, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* to illustrate the way BYU President Franklin Harris (and fellow Moyle meeting attendee) would come to the defense of his faculty. In 1934, on a visit to Utah, Russell had a conversation with Lowry Nelson, Dean of BYU's College of Applied Sciences and Director of the Extension Division. During this conversation, Russell asked Nelson about his views on immortality. Nelson replied that he was "agnostic"—ie, uncertain—about the concept and considered it "an hypothesis, which cannot be tested by any method we know, whether it is true or not."²⁹³ Russell then countered that he "'knew immortality was a fact,' and subsequently told friends that Nelson 'was a dangerous man' and that he 'wouldn't send his children [to BYU] because it would undermine their faith.'"²⁹⁴ Nelson learned that Russell had been offended, especially by the word *agnostic*, clearly misunderstanding Nelson's intent. Nelson wrote to him, trying to clarify and defend himself.

Russell then forwarded copies of their correspondence to ranking church officials who discussed the situation in a meeting with the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. They asked President Harris to bring Nelson to Salt Lake City for a meeting. Nelson wrote later that Harris "went to such lengths to defend me, that I was unable to say anything." Though church leaders threatened to fire him, they eventually dropped the case, the news of which brought Nelson to tears. Harris wrote in Nelson's defense, "Anyone who has known of [Nelson's] fine

²⁹³ Simpson, *American Universities*, 113.

²⁹⁴ Bergera, *BYU*, 57.

work...cannot be brought to condemn him because he says he does not know all the details regarding the condition in the hereafter. I find that many good men of high position vary greatly in their concepts of just what the hereafter is like.”²⁹⁵ Harris was able to tolerate nuance, but apparently Russell was not, to the point of trying to get a man fired.

Another letter showed Russell’s orthodoxy causing him problems. A letter in BYU Special Collections dated May 22, 1945, was written by Russell to the chairman of the modern language department at the University of Utah, where he had been recommended for a job. He was upset because he heard that at least two people opposed his appointment because of his “too orthodox Mormon stand in the matter of agnosticism at the B.Y.U. and a certain Mormon ward. Naturally those being off the U. of U. campus, and religion not being a part of the business of a state university one wonders about that,” he wrote. He recounted his experience teaching at universities all over the country for the past quarter-century: “In all of them I am known as an out-spoken orthodox Mormon when off the campus—an academic right which none questioned.” He therefore found it a “shock” to learn that “the only university where a man’s ‘too orthodox Mormon convictions’ are held against his appointment to the staff is in the state University of Utah.”²⁹⁶ He forwarded the letter to apostle John A. Widtsoe the next month to make him aware of the “discrimination against ‘Mormons’ for positions at the university of their state” and to speak out against corruption.²⁹⁷

Perhaps underlying his actions was a sense of jealousy toward those who had found positions in Utah schools. He said he would have taken the job “at any salary had it been

²⁹⁵ Bergera, *BYU*, 58.

²⁹⁶ George Oscar Russell to Prof. James L. Barker, May 22, 1945. G. Oscar Russell Correspondence.

²⁹⁷ George Oscar Russell to Dr. John A. Widtsoe, 18 June 1945. G. Oscar Russell Correspondence.

offered” and wanted to make it clear that “I still have no apologies to make for my stand against agnosticism at the B.Y.U. and the U. Ward; or in behalf of those who suffer from corruption and intrigue in Utah.”²⁹⁸ He seemed not to realize that perhaps it was his action of forwarding private correspondence to authorities for the purpose of getting another person removed from their job rather than his righteousness and his stand for orthodox belief that had made him unpopular.

Russell seemed to struggle to find and keep a position. He eventually found his way to Utah in 1941 as the superintendent of the Utah School for the Deaf and Blind, a position he kept for one year.²⁹⁹ Then, he was the head of Utah State Research Laboratories for two years. By 1945, when the second letter was written, he was the executive director of the National Research Foundation, which was in New York or Ohio (letterhead for his first letter is from New York, the next one, a month later, was in Ohio).³⁰⁰ In 1946, Russell went to Western College in Ohio as chairman of the Modern Language Department. He spent summers as a visiting professor at various schools including University of Chicago, University of Michigan, Purdue University, University of Wisconsin, Washington University, Central Institute of St. Louis and the Linguistic Institute at Yale. He was also a Research Associate at the Carnegie Institute. In 1955, he joined Gallaudet University in Washington, D. C. and became a Research Professor for speech, hearing, and voice of the deaf. That same year, he and his wife of nearly forty years divorced. He died in Utah at the age of 72 in 1962.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ The George Oscar Russell papers has a timeline of Russell’s life events: <https://www.gallaudet.edu/archives-and-deaf-collections/collections/manuscripts/mss-071>

³⁰⁰ Because there is no evidence of what Utah Research Laboratories or National Research Foundation are, and judging by the vague letterhead on his letter, it can be assumed he was self-employed and these were his own businesses.

Whatever was said during the Moyle meeting he attended did not bother him too greatly to remain actively and enthusiastically engaged in Mormonism. Or perhaps, like President J. Reuben Clark of the First Presidency, he had been so disturbed by the information that a strict orthodoxy was the result, manifesting in an effort to protect others from such dangerous ideas by shutting down and destroying any unorthodoxy he encountered. Although his contributions during the Moyle meetings and the extent of his expertise regarding native languages can't be known, his subsequent correspondence suggests that Russell represented one side of a range of beliefs represented in the Moyle meetings.

The Next Generation

The impact of the Moyle meetings can be appreciated not only by studying how it affected those who attended, but by examining the effect it had on the next generation. It was because of the next generation that the papers came to light. It is also significant that B. H. Roberts did not destroy the documents. Though he was disappointed with the lack of attention they were given by church leadership (or perhaps because of that reason), he carefully preserved them. In contrast, he destroyed his original notes regarding the "verbal and grammatical errors in the Book of Mormon" after depositing his data in the Church Historian's office in 1907, for the express reason that "they may not fall into the hands of those who might make wrong use of them."³⁰¹ Perhaps it was because church leadership was so unable or unwilling to deal with what Roberts had written that he was not required to do the same for his

³⁰¹ Leonard Arrington Papers, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University.

studies. In any event, Roberts passed copies to two different family members in an effort to make sure they survived.

Ben Roberts, son of B. H., kept the papers and told several people about them. He presented copies of “A Parallel” to members of the Timpanogos Club on October 10, 1946. It was then published by Mervin B. Hogan in *Rocky Mountain Mason* in January 1956.³⁰² Perhaps, like his father, Ben was distributing “A Parallel” to see if it would garner interest for the larger study. This small public forum brought some attention to the document and it was vaguely addressed in a church magazine as well as Fawn Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith, but it did not create the same tension the later publication of *Studies* would.³⁰³ The documents had more power when there was more tension within the church. The first period of tension was mainly for the intellectuals in the 1930-1940s, as mentioned during the Harris presidency at BYU, but similar concerns did not reach the main membership of the church until the social tensions created by the civil rights movement and the feminist movement created stronger waves of discontent. Before then, even those who no longer felt Mormonism’s claims to be true often stayed engaged on some level.³⁰⁴ Many felt that true or not, the Mormon church was a good place to raise children and find community.³⁰⁵

³⁰² *Studies*, ix. Mervin B. Hogan, “‘A Parallel’: A Matter of Chance versus Coincidence,” *Rocky Mountain Mason*, 4 (Jan. 1956):17.18.

³⁰³ See Madison U. Sowell, “Defending the Keystone: The Comparative Method Reexamined,” *Sunstone Magazine* Vol. 6 (May-June 1981).

³⁰⁴ This could also be because it would require excommunication and a public announcement (which some would have found humiliating) before a 1989 lawsuit made it possible for someone to withdraw their membership of their own volition: <http://mormon-alliance.org/casereports/volume3/part1/v3p1c05.htm>

³⁰⁵ B. H. Roberts seemed to be an example of this. For another compelling example, see Thomas Ferguson’s conclusion after 20 years of archaeological study failed to find proof in Stan Larson, “The Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson,” *Dialogue*, vol 23 no 1. https://www.dialoguejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/Dialogue_V23N01_57.pdf

Tension would rise within the church over the next several decades due to several factors but the one with the widest and deepest impact was the civil rights movement starting in the mid-1950s. The national movement made many members increasingly aware of the racially insensitive aspects of the church, especially the barring of people with any amount of “African” blood from the temple and the priesthood.³⁰⁶ Though the church officially lifted the ban in 1978, their defense of the practice for those decades—and the reasons they used to justify it—caused enough dissonance that many began to question church leadership.³⁰⁷ Leaders insisted that God required them to take such actions, but it was hard for many members to believe that God, who was “no respecter of persons,” (meaning God did not show favoritism) would create racist policies.³⁰⁸ It appeared to be the work of man, not God, so many members began to question the leadership’s claims of being God’s mouthpiece.³⁰⁹

While not all church members critiqued the racial bans, and most ultimately supported what their leaders said, it was an issue that all members were aware of. The critical thinkers among them were forced to consider what they believed about such a policy. Combined with increasing control over information by the church’s Correlation Committee, a growing insistence on a strict sense of orthodoxy, and the church’s more visible involvement in

³⁰⁶ In Mormon beliefs, one cannot achieve exaltation (the highest level of heaven) or be sealed to their families in the afterlife without the temple, so it was withholding rites required for eternal salvation for black members. The priesthood was the power to act for God, given to males starting at the age of 12, so this also infantilized black male members (not to mention all women, regardless of color).

³⁰⁷ Reasons included “the Curse of Cain” and being “less valiant in the pre-existence.” For on this topic, Paul W. Reeve, (2015). *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³⁰⁸ Acts 10:34.

³⁰⁹ The church’s opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment as well as gay marriage would have similar effects, but do not fall within the scope of this study.

conservative politics, some people were ready to become more outspoken in their resistance to the church's policies.³¹⁰

By the late 1960s, Anthony Ivins's son, Grant, was ready to revisit issues he had laid aside in the past when he first encountered "A Parallel." Though he had first encountered it while teaching at BYU (1929-1942), he was reminded of the subject after finding several copies of "A Parallel" in his Apostle-brother Antoine's papers following Antoine's death in October 1967. He and his brother had both owned copies of "A Parallel" but had never mentioned it, further showing the taboo that had surrounded them.³¹¹ Grant Ivins had assumed that the church had possession of the Roberts papers so he did not go looking for them until a friend, Burton Musser, told him "Benjamin Roberts...had showed him this study, and that it was really something startling."³¹² Intrigued, Ivins began an attempt to locate the papers.

Ivins contacted B. H. Roberts' grandson, Brigham E. Roberts, a lawyer in Salt Lake City in late-October 1973. Roberts had a portion of his grandfather's papers and allowed Ivins to borrow them for several days. Ivins took extensive notes and informed several friends about the papers. Though the Roberts family had been convinced that publishing the papers would tarnish their ancestor's legacy, Ivins set to work convincing them that the opposite was true; that Roberts was fearless and honest in his pursuit of truth. Ivins's motives for seeking the manuscript were clear in a letter written to a friend on December 27, 1973:

If we can manage to have this manuscript published, I will consider it the highlight of my effort to let the world know what I think of the fable of the Book of Mormon. Roberts' conclusion is that Joseph Smith undoubtedly had the Ethan Smith book in his possession, and with his fertile imagination, could easily have written the Book of

³¹⁰ As judged by letters between H. Grant Ivins and friends. See next section.

³¹¹ See H. Grant Ivins papers,

³¹² H. Grant Ivins to Lowry and Florence Nelson, November 4, 1973. H. Grant Ivins papers.

Mormon. It really is a bomb.³¹³

To another friend he wrote, “With any kind of luck, it appears that his long hidden manuscript might yet be brought to light. I hope it can happen before I am entirely out of the picture.”³¹⁴

Grant died several weeks later on February 18, 1974. Though he would not see the papers to publication, his impetus was critical in informing those who could finish what he started. They gathered portions of the papers and correspondence from other Roberts family members who had kept them safe (and quiet) and eventually allowed them to be published.

One person involved in publishing the papers due to Ivins’s efforts was Sterling McMurrin, whose grandfather Joseph W. McMurrin had been involved in the leadership meetings as a member of the Seven Presidents of the Seventy. Sterling had been told by his father about a book written by Roberts that would “just blow things sky high” if it was published.³¹⁵ The McMurrins and Robertses were close family friends; Sterling had known Roberts as a child and wrote the biographical portion of *Studies*. Like Ivins, Sterling McMurrin had also been a religion teacher for the church, teaching in the seminary (high school) and institute (college) programs from 1939-1946. He was awarded the Ph.D. in Philosophy from University of Southern California in 1946, served as the United States Commissioner of Education for John F. Kennedy, and was a highly influential professor at the University of Utah.

McMurrin tried to create a “middle-way” where Mormons could maintain membership and involvement without professing literal belief. His book, *Matters of Conscience*, was

³¹³ Ethan Smith was author of *View of the Hebrews*, the comparison against the Book of Mormon for “A Parallel” H. Grant Ivins to Bob (unknown), December 27, 1973. H. Grant Ivins Papers.

³¹⁴ H. Grant Ivins to Seth Shaw December 4, 1973. H. Grant Ivins Papers.

³¹⁵ Sterling McMurrin and Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 21.

reminiscent in some ways of Roberts's final book in its attempt to show ways to embrace religion without the dogmatic aspects. McMurrin was clear about his beliefs: "While I readily confess to being a heretic—one who doesn't believe—I frankly resent being called an apostate—one who turns against the church. I am critical of the church, but I'm for it, not against it."³¹⁶ Though he was threatened with excommunication several times for his unorthodox and outspoken beliefs, he maintained membership until his death in 1996. He believed he had avoided excommunication due to the fact that he personally knew church leadership and they did not have the heart to excommunicate someone they knew and loved (and who loved them back, despite his criticisms).³¹⁷

Sterling Talmage, as mentioned, pushed back against church leadership as well, with his letter to Joseph Fielding Smith. Between 1930 and 1935 he wrote dozens of articles in support of harmonizing faith and scientific principles. He also used his expertise as a geologist to explain the geologic age of the earth, using an address called "Earth and Man" given by his father in support of his views. Delivered during the 1931 during General Conference, it was printed in the *Deseret News* and as a pamphlet. Sterling believed it was an "apostolic utterance" and therefore it could be considered accepted and approved church doctrine. This address referred to plants and animals living and dying for ages and ages before man existed on earth (as opposed to the view that the fall of Adam brought death to the earth).³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Peggy Fletcher Stack, "McMurrin in a Gentler Time," *Salt Lake Tribune*, February 22, 1997.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Jeffrey E. Keller, "Discussion Continued: The Sequel to the Roberts/Smith/Talmage Affair" *Dialogue*, v. 15 n. 1, p. 92

In 1935, after his father as well as B. H. Roberts and Anthony Ivins died, Sterling Talmage was apparently reprimanded for his writing and was told that his father's words were not an apostolic utterance after all. In a letter to the First Presidency in December 1935, Talmage wrote, "I am very grateful to you for clarifying my mind in this respect. I shall not again, either in publication or in private correspondence, place undue stress on the authoritativeness of this document, or any statements contained in it."³¹⁹ He never did speak or write publicly on the subject again. Though he wrote a book-length manuscript called "Can Science Be Faith-Promoting?" that helped merge faith and science, he was unable to get it published before his death in 1956.

Talmage's sister Elsie was also mentioned in Grant Ivins's letters as someone who had owned a copy of "A Parallel" and shared it with others.³²⁰ She worked at the *Improvement Era* and quit around the same time her brother was reprimanded, to get away from Joseph Fielding Smith.³²¹ A letter to her brother mentioned a Smith/Talmage family feud. It had started in 1931 with the letter Sterling wrote to Smith as well as debates in leadership meetings where literalist Joseph Fielding Smith challenged B. H. Roberts and James Talmage, who argued the side of science. The debates ended in a draw and the leadership decided to take no official position. Roberts, Talmage, and Smith continued to give speeches asserting their positions, but after Roberts and Talmage died in 1933 the younger Talmage was silenced. Smith, meanwhile, lived nearly forty more years, becoming the ultimate winner in the debates (as well as the president

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ George H. Hansen to H. Grant Ivins, February 19, 1974. H. Grant Ivins Papers.

³²¹ Elsie Talmage to Sterling Talmage, Jan. 11, 1935 and April 12, 1935, George Albert Smith Collection, University of Utah Special Collections Archives. Quoted in Keller, 97 n72.

of the church), influencing the choice of candidates for future positions in the Quorum. With the help of several other apostles, Smith continued to assert influence on the side of fundamentalism for several more decades.

Also asserting influence was James Moyle's son Henry, who became an apostle in 1947, just a year after his father's death. He was less concerned about the truth claims of the church and more concerned with the good it did in the world. "Convinced of the validity of Mormonism," his biographer, Richard D. Poll wrote, "he left the finer points of theology to others and concentrated on making the church an effective force for good in the lives of its members and in the world at large."³²² He nearly bankrupted the church with his aggressive building and investment strategies, believing that increased visibility would result in greater tithing revenue to justify the cost. He was responsible for an aggressive mission program that included "Baseball Baptisms"—a program that resulted in the baptism of hundreds of young boys who had been recruited to play baseball and were baptized in order to join the team. They often did not realize they had become Mormon.³²³ Unsurprisingly, such methods had dismal retention rates and for the most part did not result in the large increase in tithing revenue as expected.

Though Henry Moyle was highly educated, earning the M.A. in Science before obtaining a law degree at Harvard, he also "expressed distrust of intellectualism" that "made him something less than the most popular figure in academic communities."³²⁴ He saw the highly

³²² Poll, *Working*, 162.

³²³ For more on Baseball Baptisms, see D. Michael Quinn, "I-Thou vs. I-It Conversions: The Mormon 'Baseball Baptisms' Era," *Sunstone*: <https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/pdf/093-30-44.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2019).

³²⁴ Poll, *Working*, 169.

educated as arrogant and potential trouble-makers. Perhaps this was because he had seen from his father's experience that some questions did not have satisfactory answers and concluded that it would be better simply to concentrate on the good the church could do.

Franklin Harris, Jr. was also a member of the second generation whose actions appear to have a connection to the Moyle meetings and the troubling information encountered by participants. He gathered proof to support the Book of Mormon's authenticity. He co-authored a book with apostle John A. Widtsoe in 1937 called *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon: A Collection of Evidences*. Essentially a bibliography of apologetic arguments, this book was intended as a compact missionary tool. It provided brief, summarized sources of arguments that had been made by Mormon scholars in defense of the Book of Mormon. The introduction stated, "If the proof of any one of these claims is convincing, the probability of the others being true also is greatly augmented," implying that one did not need to look for all the proof.³²⁵ Plausibility was the focus; a few pieces of convincing evidence would be enough.

Harris Jr. also published a book in 1953 entitled *The Book of Mormon: Message and Evidences*. In the dedication, he gave credit to the late Dr. John A. Widtsoe "with whom the author first started studying seriously the Book of Mormon," which makes one wonder if he had not studied the Book of Mormon in his father's home. Harris Jr. was quite confident in his conclusion: "The Book of Mormon is a copy of ancient records and not a novel or fictional account."³²⁶ While Harris, Jr. may have satisfied his own mind on the subject, his arguments did

³²⁵ John A. Widtsoe and Franklin Harris, Jr., *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon: A Collection of Evidences*, (Independence: Zion's Printing and Publishing Co., 1937).

³²⁶ Franklin S. Harris, Jr. *The Book of Mormon: Message and Evidences* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1953), 203.

not convince everyone. The question was again being vigorously debated in the aftermath of B. H. Roberts's *Studies* publication in 1985.

The B. H. Roberts meetings were a pivotal point in LDS Church history. Roberts himself called it a “crisis” when speaking to Wesley Lloyd in 1933, and it appears to have had long-ranging impact on both church leaders and intellectuals as they tried to answer the questions. The seriousness is evidenced by the range of voices he sought at the time to solve the problems. Roberts looked to both God—hoping prayer and revelation might solve the problem within the church hierarchy—and Science, hoping the most educated people in the land, with their wide range of experience, could create new ways to answer the difficult questions. He even asked women who were both intelligent *and* sensitive to the whisperings of the Holy Spirit to assist in the quest for answers.

Conclusion

One final indication of the impact of this episode on Mormon history was a careful avoidance of B. H. Roberts himself (and especially the 1922 secret meetings) in church literature. Nothing was written publicly about them at the time; only a few brief journal entries indicated that the meetings happened at all. Biographies of participants were either sanitized—as discussed with the Moyle biographies—or, in Roberts's case, kept from publication, inaccurate, *and* sanitized in a possible effort to forget, then bolster, his legacy. Other participants have few or no papers available at all. Whether or not there was a concerted effort

to hide the fact that the Moyle meetings occurred, they were certainly never mentioned until this research identified those involved and explored their impact.

After publication of Roberts's *Studies*, formal discussion centered on Roberts himself and whether or not he lost belief.³²⁷ Concentrating on Roberts alone effectively directed attention away from the rest of the leadership. Although it has been known by historians since at least 1979 that members of church leadership had been made aware of the external problems of the Book of Mormon in 1922, this has not been a major focus for historians. Church sources avoided mention of the leadership meetings as much as possible, while outside historians have suffered from a lack of access to additional sources within the church archives.

The fact that leadership meetings were held in connection to B. H. Roberts's studies was disclosed only once in a church outlet, published in 1979.³²⁸ This was just after an incomplete copy of the papers had been donated to the University of Utah, before they were widely available and while there was still a chance that the papers would not surface in any meaningful way. The article, written by Roberts's biographer Truman Madsen and published in *Brigham*

³²⁷ See *Studies* intro. For critical sources see: George D. Smith, Jr. "Defending the Keystone: Book of Mormon Difficulties" *Sunstone* 6 (May-June 1981); George D. Smith, Jr. "'Is there any way to escape these difficulties?': The Book of Mormon Studies of B. H. Roberts," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* v17 n2 (Summer 1984); George D. Smith, Jr. "B. H. Roberts: Book of Mormon Apologist and Skeptic" in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalf (Salt Lake City: Signatures Book, 2002). For church sources see: For church sources addressing Roberts's *Studies*, see Truman Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 19, no 4. (Summer 1979); Truman Madsen, "B. H. Roberts after Fifty Years" *Ensign*, December 1983; and John Welsh, "B. H. Roberts: Seeker after Truth," *Ensign*, March 1986. For an overview of the debates, see John-Charles Duffy, "Mapping Book of Mormon Historicity Debates—Part I," *Sunstone* 151 (October 2008).

³²⁸ Another article written in 1999 mentions the meetings in a footnote but does not reference them in the body. See Davis Bitton, "B. H. Roberts and Book of Mormon Scholarship" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*: Vol. 8, No. 2, Article 10.

Young University Studies, would have reached only a limited audience—almost exclusively faithful, educated Mormons.³²⁹

This article argued that Roberts had prepared the documents as a lawyer would prepare a devil's advocate defense, that he had made a presentation to the leadership, and that Roberts (as well as the leadership) had been mostly unbothered by the material he had been asked to prepare. Madsen briefly mentioned two days of meetings (although there were three) and simply stated that Elder Talmage "predicted in his journal that the Book of Mormon would be vindicated," when Talmage had more accurately assured himself that horses had existed.³³⁰ The second study, according to Madsen, was written for the leadership, but "it is not clear how much of this typewritten report was actually submitted." Madsen then assured readers that the documents did not represent Roberts's own convictions and that "many of the perceived problems are no longer problems."³³¹

Once it was clear that *Studies* would be published, two more articles were written—one before publication of *Studies* in 1983, also written by Truman Madsen, and one afterward in 1986 by BYU law professor John Welch.³³² Both were addressed to general membership in the church's magazine, *The Ensign*. Both skillfully and carefully avoided any mention that meetings were held. Both presented a narrative that Roberts, as part of an assignment, had prepared the documents without much thought or conviction. Both articles indicated that Roberts had basically worked alone on a project that was meant for only leadership. While the first article

³²⁹ Truman Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4. (Summer 1979).

³³⁰ Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," 439-440.

³³¹ Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," 441.

³³² Truman Madsen, "B. H. Roberts after Fifty Years" *Ensign*, December 1983; and John Welch, "B. H. Roberts: Seeker after Truth," *Ensign*, March 1986.

wrote that Roberts had submitted the second study to President Grant, the second article “corrected” that statement and suggested that leadership was mostly unaware of the contents of Roberts’s studies because he had not shared them with anyone.³³³ Both articles assured readers that Roberts’s issues had been resolved in the intervening years.

What had been a “crisis” that called for the assistance of the top levels of leadership and the smartest people at their disposal in 1922, was effectively minimized in official accounts sixty years later, characterized as a couple of documents that even the author cared little about. By keeping the focus squarely on Roberts’s personal beliefs, questions about the rest of church leadership (not to mention the assembled scholars) were successfully dodged. The impact of his work on the people who had been in the 1922 meetings, as well as the impact the ideas had on the church as a whole, have never really been explored.

To this day, the church denies having possession of the papers B. H. Roberts presented. Privately, the church would claim to have the original—and therefore the copyright—in a letter from the legal department in protest of the papers being published, but the two main studies are not listed in the register and church employees were unable to find them, even when shown the letter in which the legal department claims to have them.³³⁴ The first document was undoubtedly submitted and presented; a copy of the letter of submission (the one that requested the leadership meetings) still exists in the B. H. Roberts papers and journals mention the meetings. Former church history department employee D. Michael Quinn stated that he

³³³ Welch argued that the second “Study” was never submitted, then carefully made it seem as though he was talking about both studies when he implied that church leadership had not been aware of Roberts’s work.

³³⁴ Harry D. Pugsley to Chase N. Peterson, 28 January 1988, Everett Cooley Papers, Marriott Library. There is one well-worn copy of “A Parallel” in the B. H. Roberts Papers at the Church History Library with restricted access.

had personally seen both sets of papers when he discovered the “lost” file cabinets containing B. H. Roberts’s work in the basement of the Church History Library in 1972.³³⁵

Hiding Roberts’s papers in the basement of the church archives did not make those who were aware of his studies forget what they contained. Church leaders and members of the Mormon intelligentsia whispered about the Roberts papers among themselves for over fifty years. Their continued questions and doubts (even if avoided or denied) affected church policies and made leaders nervous in the meantime. This fact is clearly illustrated in private correspondence between Leonard Arrington, Church Historian, and John L. Sorenson, a BYU anthropologist.³³⁶ Arrington had clearly asked Sorenson to give his assessment of the papers; this letter was Sorenson’s reply. Roughly sixty years after Roberts created the documents, Sorenson admitted:

I myself had heard over the years dark rumors about how damning the Roberts’ manuscript was. Of course I could never consult it, until now. There will be those enemies of the Church who will say that the Church was afraid, all those years since 1922, to reveal this piece of work because it would so damage the case for the Book of Mormon.³³⁷

Though Sorenson followed this comment with an assurance that the information was not so bad after all and that he was confident that they could overcome Roberts’s issues, his comment nevertheless showed that fear, whispers, and damning “dark rumors” lurked in the background (and the literal basement) of church offices for over half a century.

³³⁵ Per personal conversation with Quinn on February 25, 2019- his account of finding B. H. Roberts’ papers in the basement of the Historian’s office on July 11, 1972 can be found in D. Michael Quinn, “My Journey from *Essentials in Church History* to *The Mormon Hierarchy Series*,” *Journal of Mormon History* Vol. 44 no. 2 (April 2018), p. 65-66.

³³⁶ The letter is undated, but was presumably written between 1979, when the papers were first donated the University of Utah and 1982, when Arrington was quietly demoted and his offices sent to BYU, as it was addressed to him in the church offices.

³³⁷ John L. Sorensen to Leonard Arrington (date unknown), Leonard Arrington Papers.

At the end of his first study, Roberts's desperation was clear in his plea for answers. He asked the assembled church leaders:

What shall our answer be then? Shall we boldly acknowledge the difficulties in the case, confess that the evidences and conclusions of the authorities are against us, but notwithstanding all that, we take our position on the Book of Mormon and place its revealed truth against the declarations of men, however learned, and await the vindication of the revealed truth? Is there any other course than this? And yet the difficulties to this position are very grave. Truly we may ask "Who will believe our report?" in that case. What will the effect be upon our youth of such a confession of inability to give a more reasonable answer to the questions submitted, and the awaiting of proof for final vindication? Will not the hoped-for proof deferred indeed make the heart sick? Is there any way to escape these difficulties?³³⁸

Roberts hoped to find a way to escape these difficulties, but answers were not as forthcoming as he hoped. In 1922, Roberts had been bothered that his "plausible" answers in reply to Riter's letter would not satisfy the thinking man and gathered with a group of the brightest Mormon minds in an attempt to find intellectually satisfying answers. The 1920s and early 1930s were a period of intellectual flowering for Mormon scholars.

As time passed, when the "hoped-for proof" was not discovered, Church leaders would increasingly teach that certain things could only be understood spiritually and with sufficient amounts of faith. Just eleven years after the meetings, church educators would be told that their truth would unavoidably find conflict with "the findings of human research"; and when it did, the Saints must have the "intellectual courage" to embrace the truth.³³⁹ Church educators would be increasingly warned that "some things that are true are not very useful," and a church historian was instructed that "historians should tell only that part of the truth that is inspiring

³³⁸ Roberts, *Studies*, 143.

³³⁹ J. Reuben Clark, "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," quoted in Simpson, *American Universities*, 120.

and uplifting.”³⁴⁰ The confidence of the early 1920s that led Roberts to claim that it was the church’s responsibility to prove the Book of Mormon was true and that led President Grant to proclaim he had nothing at all to fear about science had dissipated in the wake of B. H. Roberts’s findings and the lack of immediate positive answers.

When addressing a group of apologists at a dinner in 2002, apostle Dallin H. Oaks gave a talk that finally seemed to answer Roberts’s questions: “What shall our answer be then? What will the effect be upon our youth of such a confession of inability to give a more reasonable answer to the questions submitted?” In his talk, “The Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” which explained why maintaining historicity was non-negotiable, Oaks stated:

Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.³⁴¹

In other words, church apologists did not need to have an answer for difficult questions. They simply needed to be willing to make somewhat rational arguments in order to help people maintain faith. They simply would not—as Roberts had assumed they would need to do—“confess the inability to give a reasonable answer.”

³⁴⁰ Boyd K. Packer, “The Mantle is Far, Far Greater than the Intellect.,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 21 no. 3 (Summer 1981), 259–278; D. Michael Quinn, “On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath),” in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 76.

³⁴¹ See Dallin H. Oaks, “The Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 237–48, quoting Austin Fairer in “The Christian Apologist,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 26. Available at: <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/11-historicity-book-mormon> (Accessed October 20, 2019)

As the questions Roberts raised in 1922 worked in the background, the previous confidence was replaced with caution.³⁴² The feared strength of the doubts Roberts raised made his legacy seem dangerous to many church leaders, even decades after his death. Attempts were made to avoid a full discussion of him and his work. Minutes of the 1922 leadership meetings, journals of many of the attendees, and any document related to them—especially for those in the hierarchy—are carefully guarded and cannot be seen, even by church employees. But the weight of Roberts’s questions can still be felt and measured, even in their supposed absence. Some members of the intelligentsia worked hard over the years to find answers. However, the doubt and “dark rumors” raised by B. H. Roberts were never fully extinguished and have continued to influence church members and leaders alike.

Roberts had been willing to tackle questions and search for answers, seeking help from both spiritual and intellectual authorities. After those meetings, Franklin Harris and others sought to make room in Mormonism for broad intellectual and religious thought. Frederick Pack and others demonstrated ways that religion and science could strengthen each other and warned that taking a stand against science could only weaken the church’s position. Janne Sjodahl and others sought to make archaeology support their claims. Amy Brown Lyman and others struggled with the changing roles of women in the church. Richard Lyman and others struggled with the battle for dominance between liberal and conservative approaches to doctrine and church membership. The people involved in the 1922 meetings represented a wide range of experience. A study of their lives as well as their interests showed a magnificent

³⁴² For more on the development of “faithful” Mormon studies, see John-Charles Duffy, “Faithful Scholarship: The Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies and the Politics of Insider Discourse,” M. A. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006.

cross-section of issues facing the church during the first several decades of the twentieth century and demonstrated a contrast between that period and the years that followed for everyone involved.

Appendix A (Meeting Attendees)

Meeting Attendees

Leadership Meetings:

First Presidency:

Heber J. Grant- President

Charles W. Penrose- 1st Counselor.

Anthony W. Ivins- 2nd Counselor.

Quorum of Twelve:

Rudger Clawson

George Albert Smith

George F. Richards

David O. McKay

Joseph Fielding Smith

James E. Talmage- Ph.D.- Geology

Stephen L Richards- Law

Richard R. Lyman- Ph.D. Engineering

Melvin J. Ballard

John A. Widtsoe -Ph.D.- Agriculture

[missing= Reed Smoot (in D.C.), Orson F. Whitney (in England)]

Seventies:

Seymour Young- MD

B.H. Roberts

J. Golden Kimball

Charles H. Hart- Law

Rulon S. Wells

Joseph W. McMurrin

Levi Edgar Young- M.A.

Presiding Patriarch:

Hyrum G. Smith

Total= 21.

7 of 21 have advanced degrees “abroad

Moyle home meetings:

April 28- Janne Sjodahl journal.

Attendees:

Anthony Ivins- LDS 1st Counselor

Dr. James E. Talmage- Ph.D Geologist, Apostle

Merry May Talmage- Homemaker

B.H. Roberts- General Authority Seventy

Margaret Shipp Roberts- M.D.

James Moyle- J.D.- Lawyer

Alice Dinwoodey Moyle- Homemaker

Col. Willard Young-West Point Graduate- Engineer, cartographer

Dr. Franklin S. Harris-Ph.D.- Agronomy

Dr. Frederick J. Pack- Ph.D. -Geology

Dr. Andrew Affleck Kerr- Ph.D.- Archaeology

Prof. Hinckley- (either Edwin, Ph.D. Geologist or Bryant-Educator)

Dr. Charles L. Olsen- M.D.

Dr. George Middleton- M.D.

J. M. Sjodahl. -Divinity degree- BofM archaeology hobbyist

Total= 15 (3 women)

May 25- Richard R. Lyman journal.

Attendees:

Anthony W. Ivins

James E. Talmage

Merry May Talmage

B.H. Roberts

Margaret Shipp-Roberts

Dr. Frederick J. Pack

Prof. George Oscar Russell- Speech Expert

J.M Sjodahl

Amy Brown Lyman- Social Worker

Richard R. Lyman- Ph.D.-Engineering

Also in attendance, Franklin Harris, according to Harris journal.

Total= 11-12. (2 women, 3 if Mrs. Moyle was there)

Drop-outs: Willard Young, Dr. Kerr, Prof Hinckley, Dr. Olsen, Dr. Middleton

Add-ins: Richard and Amy Lyman, Prof. Russell

Constants: Ivins, Talmages, Robertses, Moyles, Harris, Pack, Sjodahl

Total=17 (13 not GAs)

Of those not in church leadership (and two within church leadership), all men and one woman have advanced degrees

Appendix B (Journals/Letters)

Journal entries/letters about meetings:

Leadership Meetings:

President Heber J. Grant (Arrington papers*):

4 January 1922: "At 10:30, the First Presidency and Apostles and members of the First Council of the Seventy met in the office of the First Presidency and we listened to a long paper asking questions regarding the Book of Mormon, which paper was read by Bro. B. H. Roberts...At 4:30 the First Presidency, Apostles and First Council of Seventy met again and listened to another long paper by Bro. Roberts. The meeting lasted until six p.m."

26 January 1922. "...we went to the regular council meeting in the temple at 10 a.m. The meeting lasted until 3:15. Bro Ivins made a long explanation on Book of Mormon matters, and Bro. B. H. Roberts was present and he also made an extensive talk. Bro. J. Golden Kimball and Bro. Charles H. Hart were also present in addition to ten of the Apostles, my counselors, and the Presiding Patriarch."

*Typed excerpts from Arrington papers. Church History Library staff could not locate the originals.

-Less detailed Journal entries from Church History Library:

4 January 1922: Arrived office about 9:30 am met with pcy apostles seventies about 10am in large room. Discussion till 2pm. Met again at 4:30 PM in session until 6pm. Heard Bro BH Roberts read his long letter regarding certain criticism that had been made of the Book of Mormon. Did the usual office work between meeting and after the last one. . .

January 5- Arrived office about 9:30 got several letters off- went to Council Meeting at Temple- it lasted until 4pm. [returned] to office signed lots of mail- pcy apostles, council of seventy + patriarch met in large Room- meeting continued until 8pm.

5 to 9 ½ rsly and comments on Bro BHR's- readgs of yd +2d-

January 26, 1922. [Went to office, had meetings, no details.] "Later had interviews with CSB [ASB?] + Pres Ivins.

Apostle James E. Talmage:³⁴³

Jan. 4, Wed.: Attended forenoon and afternoon sessions of a meeting of the First Presidency, the Twelve, and the First Council of Seventies, listening to a lengthy but valuable report by Elder B. H. Roberts, relating to his Book of Mormon study. Brother Roberts has assembled a long list of points called "difficulties", meaning thereby what non-believers in the Book of Mormon call discrepancies between that record and the results of archeological and other scientific investigations. As examples of these "difficulties" may be mentioned the views put forth by some living writers to the effect that no vestige of either Hebrew or Egyptian appears in the language of the American Indians, or Amerinds. Another is the positive declaration by certain writers that the horse did not exist upon the Western Continent during historic times prior to the coming of Columbus.

I know the Book of Mormon to be a true record; and many of the "difficulties", or objections as critics would urge, are after all but negative in their nature. The Book of Mormon states that Lehi and his colony found horses upon this continent when they arrived; and therefore horses were here at that time.

Jan. 5: Attended a missionary meeting at 9 a.m. and assisted in setting apart a number. Then attended the weekly meeting of the First Presidency and Twelve in the Temple, which on this occasion was attended also by some of the First Council of the Seventy at which we listened to further reading by Elder B. H. Roberts. At 4:20 p.m. a recess was taken, and the brethren assembled again in the Church Office Building and gave further consideration to Brother Roberts' report. We remained in session until nearly 8 p.m.

January 26: Attended council meeting of the First Presidency and Twelve. Part of the session was devoted to the hearing of further report by Elder B. H. Roberts on the subject of "Book of Mormon 'difficulties'".

February 2: Attended council meeting of the First Presidency and Twelve. Following this I attended a committee meeting, comprising President Ivins, Elder John A. Widtsoe, and myself, in conference with Elder B. H. Roberts, and considered with approval his proposed letter of reply to certain Book of Mormon questions.

Apostle Richard R. Lyman:³⁴⁴

January 3: Communication with respect to questions on Book of Mormon by BH Roberts=10 Discussions=52

January 4: 10:30 Meeting in President's office to hear B.H. Roberts on the matter of questions concerning the Book of Mormon... How could scripture have been common among the people there being no printing. People inhabit permanent homes & [hablamos?] would [move] about

³⁴³ James E. Talmage Journals located in BYU Special Collections.

³⁴⁴ Richard R. Lyman Journals located in BYU Special Collections.

rapidly.” [Calculations- 58 pages in 60/50//110, plus tic marks] 4:30 2nd session B.H. Roberts. 4:40-6:00= 1 hr. 20 min.

Thurs. Jan 5, 1922, S.L.C. 10am- Regular weekly meeting of Council and Bro Roberts delivered the third portion of his Book of Mormon criticisms or questions. B.H. Roberts 10:15-11:35” Pres. Rudger Clawson: 11:35-12= 25 min. George Albert Smith-12:15= 17. George F. Richards- 12:23=6. David O. McKay-12:33=10. Jos Fielding Smith-12:45=12. James E. Talmage-1:15=30. Luncheon. Stephen L Richards 2:00-2:11=11. RRL 2:21=10. Melvin J. Ballard-2:40=19. John A. Widtsoe 3:10=30. Hyrum G. Smith- 3:11=1. Chas H. Hart-3:25=14. Seymour B. Young 3:45=20. Recess in President’s office. 5pm. Continued. Pres A.W. Ivins 5:15-6:45= 1hr 30 min. Judge Chas H. Hart-6:58=13 discussion. Levi E. Young- 7:05=7. Pres. Heber J. Grant 7:05-7:40.

Thurs Jan 26, 1922. 10am Weekly Council Meeting. Brother Ivins made a fine address on Book of Mormon prompted by letter from B.H. Roberts. Seven presidents of seventies [present report?]” [Again lists who spoke and how long.] HGS-2:23-2:36=4. JAW-2:39=6. MJB-2:40=1. RRL-2:41=1. SLR-2:43=2. JET-2:44=1. JFS-2:45=1. DOM-2:46=1. GFR-2:50=4. GAS-2:51=1. RC-2:52=1. AWI=2:58=6. Pres Grant-3:11=13.

Apostle George Albert Smith:³⁴⁵

January 1, 1922: [recounts week] “spent remainder of week until Tuesday afternoon attending Quarterly meetings of the Twelve and met with the Presidency and Bro BH Roberts on matters pertaining to the Book of Mormon reconciling the faults found in it as a result of so-called scientific analysis Etc.”

January 26, “Thursday when I went to my Council meeting at temple was not well and returned hence quite under the weather. Was confined to the house until Tuesday Jan 31 when I went to the office. I did spend two hours at home of RR Lyman Monday night and spoke to Ensign Club but was not well.

[Later entry mentions pain around his heart. Promptly got sick, had to leave temple meeting on January 26.]

Apostle George Franklin Richards.³⁴⁶

January 4, 1922: I made the talk at the temple meeting 9am and from 10am to 6pm except while attending to sealing ordinances was in a meeting of the presidency, the Twelve, and Council of Seventy hearing Pres. B.H. Roberts present a paper of 141 type written pages he had prepared while considering five questions upon the Book of Mormon submitted by a Mr. Couch or Mrs. In the evening I went to the dentists...

³⁴⁵ George Albert Smith Journals located in University of Utah Special Collections.

³⁴⁶ George Franklin Richards located at Church history archives, closed to research. Permission to see only January 4 was granted, was shown a photocopy of a partial page. Request to see other pages denied, was told there was “nothing else of interest.”

Seymour Young (Seventy):³⁴⁷

Thursday, January 5, spent the entire day and evening in discussing Brother Robert's letter on the Scientific proofs of the Book of Mormon. His letter showing the secular evidence and scientific proofs contrary to that Sacred Volume."

Mentions visit from dr. Middleton January 8

[n.d. talks about grasshopper vs Locusts, then] Listened to the reading of B.H. Roberts on the Scientific Discoveries of the American Continent in from the Book of Mormon.

Thursday, the 12th met with the Council and were invited with other members of the council to a meeting in President Grant's Room to listen to further explanation on the above named subject. We had the pleasure of eating dinner in the Temple by invitation of Pres. Grant with the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles.

Wednesday the 19th, in the office most of the day **Thursday the 26th** did not attend our council meeting this morning on account of other engagements. Brother Kimball reported that Brother Roberts and Brother Hart and himself were invited to the Presidents Council room in the Temple to hear some more criticisms by Brother Roberts on the testimonial letter concerning the Book of Mormon and scientific discoveries on this continent in the re-search made by President Ivins. **Friday the 27th**, in the office most of the day and appointed a gathering of the members of the" [page ends]

Other Journals:

David O. McKay (UofU): Tiny datebook has no mention of meetings, but on February 2 has a note: thought: The best way to meet a difficulty is to face it.

Stephen L. Richards: Closed. First Presidency Vault (only first presidency can access). Told there was too much confidential information and there was a "very slim chance that it contains anything that would be of use to you." Mentor to Gordon B. Hinckley.

Moyle Meetings:

James E. Talmage:

April 28, Fri. In the evening Wife and I attended a gathering at the home of Brother and Sister James H. Moyle, at which place were gathered a number of others, the purpose being to consider certain phases of study relating to the external evidences of the genuineness of the Book of Mormon. There was an interesting discussion, and tentative plans were made for other meetings.

May 25, Thurs.: ... in the evening attended a small gathering at the home of Brother and Sister James H. Moyle, called for the further consideration of matters relating to the external evidences of the genuineness of the Book of Mormon. See entry for Friday April 28th.

³⁴⁷ Located in Church History Library

Richard R. Lyman:

Thurs. **May 25**, 1922. . "8pm attended a gathering at the home of James Moyle to discuss Book of Mormon problems. Present- A.W. Ivins, James E. Talmage and his wife, B.H. Roberts and his wife Dr. Margaret, Dr. F.J. Pack, Prof. Russell of the UofU, Bro. Schrdall (?) -Amy B.-"

J.M. Sjodahl:

April 28: Attended a meeting at the home of James Moyle, 411 E. First South St. Salt [Lake] City. Present were President Anthony W. Ivins, Dr. and Mrs. James E. Talmage, B.H. Roberts and Mrs. Roberts, Col. Willard Young, Dr. Harris, B.Y.U. Provo; Dr. Pack, Dr. Kerr, Prof. [Hinckley], Dr. Olsen, Dr. Middleton, J.M. Sjodahl. Mr. Moyle suggested that an association be formed for the study of American archeology with reference to Book of Mormon evidence. After an informed discussion, from 8:30 to 11pm it was decided to meet again and hear a lecture by Dr. Kerr on the trend of American Archeology during the last 50 years. The date for the next meeting ~~was~~ set May 25.

Franklin Harris:

April 28: In office during forenoon. In afternoon went to Salt Lake. In evening attended meeting on "Book of Mormon" at home of J.H. Moyle.

May 25. School. In evening went to Salt Lake where I attended a meeting at the home of Jos. H. Moyle on the "Book of Mormon."

June 29, Thurs. School. In evening went to Salt Lake to attend meeting on "Book of Mormon" at the home of J.H. Moyle.

Others:

Lloyd Wesley Journal:

Aug 7, 1933: Discussion with Bro Roberts very interesting. This account of it is as near as I can remember. I ask him about his new book which some authorities of the church would not accept. He explained that it was by far his best work, and a climax to a life of study. The part that could not be accepted by some of the authorities was where he had suggested that the knowledge of God to his people came perhaps to fill local needs. That the story of the creation was a double account. And a brief account of the creation up to Adam and then a detailed account of God's dealings with men from Adam on to the present. This allowed for pre adamic man, which (thought?) Joseph Fielding Smith and others could not follow, he said ~~that Joseph~~ he was called before the Twelve and given an opportunity to explain his side of the case after Pres Grant had turned the matter over to the twelve for settlement. He explained his stand and when Joseph Fielding Smith ask for time to prepare an answer. After several weeks it was prepared and Pres Roberts was invited to attend the meeting with the Twelve where the paper was read. It sounded to him like a school boy composition and he told some of them so and prepared a paper of his own and sent to Pres Grant and Pres. Ivins who passed it back to the First Presidency and received severe criticism from Pres. Grant for it. They warned Bro Roberts to change parts of the book but he said he would not. In one meeting President Grant just told

them both to drop it which was a snap judgement and a temporary defeat for Roberts because dropping the controversy merely meant that the book could not be published under Church sanction. In the meantime Joseph F. Smith had very unethically published in the Utah Genealogy magazine a veiled attack on Roberts unpublished work. In the article he dogmatically stated that before Adam there was no death- not even in the animal or vegetable world. That death of any sort was brought into the world by the fall of Adam and that was enough for him although science or anything else tried to prove to the contrary. This dogmatic way of saying the last word on the subject was too much for Roberts. He wrote to the First Presidency admonishing that they either approve Brother Smiths article or say that it was put out without their sanction. He pointed out to them that Orson Hyde, a more important and more qualified apostle than Joseph Fielding Smith had given a speech in the Tabernacle setting forth just the opposite doctrine at the close of which President Brigham Young had arisen and given his sanction to it and complemented Apostle Hyde on the truth of his remarks. To Roberts this paradox of teaching seemed to put the Church in a very inconsistent position. The battle, however was tabled and his book remains unpublished but will be published under his own direction without Church backing if he can raise the money. (he offered to resign) I then ask Bro Roberts what he thought of the present Church Missionary system, and he said we were kidding ourselves in regard to its effectiveness, that the missionaries were too often going out apologetically and that our present mode of refusing to let Elders go into the field until they had a guarantee of financial backing was in opposition to the spirit of missionary work as Joseph Smith organized it. In discussing Brigham Young he said in spite of his outstanding qualities he was not a logical man in the sense that Joseph Smith was logical and that our present authoritative dictatorship in Church government was an outgrowth of Brigham Youngs practice and that Joseph Smith was much more democratic. He said that Brigham Young had an early tendency to fatalism ~~and~~ into predestination of Calvin which became very marked in his later life and that when some good historian uncovers the real facts of his stand during the Johnson Army episode, some of his glory or fame will diminish. The conversation then drifted to the Book of Mormon and ~~this revolutionary and~~ surprising story he related to me. That while he was Pres. Of the Eastern States mission a Logan man by the name of Riter persuaded a scholarly friend who was a student in Washington to read thru and criticize the Book of Mormon. The criticism was that at the time of the discovery of America there were fifty (?) distinct languages in existence among the American Indians, not dialects but language as different as English is from Spanish and that all Human knowledge indicates that fundamental languages change very slowly whereas at the time of the Book of Mormon the people were supposed to have been speaking all one tongue. This student asked Riter to explain that proposition. Riter sent the letter to Dr. Talmadge who studied it over and during a trip east ask Bother Roberts to make a careful investigation and study and to get an answer for the letter. Roberts went to work and investigated it from ~~another~~ every angle. But could not answer it satisfactorily to himself; at his request Pres. Grant called a meeting of the Twelve Apostles and Bro. Roberts presented the matter, told them frankly that he was stumped and ask for their aide in the explanation. In answer, they merely stood up and bore testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. George Albert Smith in tears testified that his faith in the Book had not been shaken by the question. Pres Ivins, the man most likely to be able to answer a question on that subject was unable to produce the solution. No answer was available. Bro Roberts could not criticize them

for not being able to answer it or to assist him, but said that in a Church which claimed continuous revelation, a crisis had arisen where revelation was necessary. After the meeting he wrote to Pres. Grant expressing his disappointment at the failure and especially at the failure of Pres Ivins to contribute to the problem. It was mentioned at the meeting by Bro Roberts that there were other book of Mormon problems that needed special attention. Richard R. Lyman spoke up and ask if they were things that would help our prestige and when Bro Roberts answered no, he said then why discuss them. This attitude was too much for the historically minded Roberts. There was however a committee appointed to study this problem, consisting of Bros Talmage, Ballard, Roberts, and one other Apostle. They met and looked vacantly at one and another, but none seemed to know what to do about it. Finally Bro Roberts mentioned that he had at least attempted an answer and he had it in his drawer. That it was an answer that would satisfy people that didn't think, but a very inadequate answer to a thinking man. They ask him to read it and after hearing it they adopted it by vote and said that was about the best they could do. After this Bro Roberts made a special Book of Mormon study, treated the problem systematically and historically and in a 400 typewritten page thesis set forth a revolutionary article on the origin of the Book of Mormon and sent it to Pres Grant. Its an article far too strong for the average church member but for the intellectual group he considers it a contribution to assist in explaining Mormonism. He swings to a psychological explanation of the Book of Mormon an shows that the plates were not objective but subjective with Joseph Smith, that his exceptional imagination qualified him psychologically for the experience which he had in presenting to the world the Book of Mormon and that the plates with the urim and Thummim were not objective. He explained certain literary difficulties in the Book as the miraculous incident of the entire notion of the Jaredites, the dramatic story of one man being left on each side, and one of them finally being slain, also the New England flat hill surroundings of a great civilization of another part of the country. We see none of the cliffs of the Mayas or the high mountain peaks or other geographical environments of early American civilization that the entire story laid in a New England flat hill surrounding. These are some of the things which has made Bro Roberts shift his base on the Book of Mormon. Instead of regarding it as the strongest evidence we have of Church Divinity, he regards it as the one which needs the more bolstering. His greatest claim for the divinity of the Prophet Joseph lies in the Doctrine and Covenants."

Book of Mormon Geography meetings:

[January 14, 1921; James E. Talmage, Diary]

In addition to other committee work I attended an afternoon session of the Book of Mormon committee, at which preliminary arrangements were made for hearing some of the proponents of different views on Book of Mormon geography. Many varied and conflicting views concerning the location of Book of Mormon lands have been advocated amongst our people; and not a few maps have been put out. With all the precautions taken to make plain the fact that these maps have been intended as suggestive presentations only, we find some people accepting one map and others another as authoritative. The matter was brought before the Council through the receipt of a communication from Elder Joel Ricks of Logan, who several years ago published a map, of which over 6000 have been disposed of. Brother Ricks and several other good brethren have voiced a sort

of complaint that they have had no opportunity to present their views, with the fulness they would desire, before the Church authorities. The entire matter was referred to the Book of Mormon committee; and today appointments were made for the beginning of the series of hearings.

Jan. 21, Fri.: Sat with the rest of the Book of Mormon committee in the first session appointed for the hearing of those who have views to present on the subject of Book of Mormon geography. The entire afternoon was occupied by Brother Joel Ricks of Logan, who exhibited a copy of his map, and gave many details of his personal travels and investigations in the northern part of South America and in part of Central America.

Jan. 22, Sat.: The Book of Mormon committee sat during both forenoon and afternoon. Elder Joel Ricks occupied part of the morning session, and the rest of that meeting, together with the whole of the afternoon session was given over to Elder Willard Young, who claims that most of the Book of Mormon scenes were laid in Guatemala, and Honduras.

Jan. 23, Sunday: [...] I had looked forward to this opportunity of attending Sunday School in my own ward for once; but this was made impossible by action taken at last night's meeting of the Book of Mormon committee this forenoon. This morning Elder Willard Young continued his presentation. [...]

Jan. 24, Mon.: We were engaged from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Book of Mormon hearing, with a noon intermission. Elder Anthony W. Ivins of the Council of the Twelve presented his views and suggestions, indicating that the Book of Mormon lands embraced mainly Yucatan and Mexico. There being none others who had expressed a desire to be heard by the committee, this meeting was regarded as the closing session of the present stage of the investigation.

J.M. Sjodahl:

January 21, 1921. Attended a meeting by the Book of Mormon Committee, consisting of George F. Richards, Orson F. Whitney, James E. Talmage, Anthon W. Ivins, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Melvin J. Ballard, held in the Church Office building, fourth floor, beginning at 2 p.m. The object of the meeting was to give certain brethren an opportunity to state their views regarding the geography of the Book of Mormon. Elder Joel Ricks of Logan made the first address. He began his construction of the Book of Mormon map by assuming that the "narrow neck" mentioned in that record is the Isthmus of Panama, and that the land south, or Lehi, is South America, and the land north, Mulek, North America. He told of his exploration in the northern parts of South America and especially the country through which the Magdalena river flows, and expressed his conviction that Zarahemla was located there.

Jan. 22- The meeting was continued. Col. Willard Young made his statement. He read from the Book of Mormon such passages as he thought incompatible with the theory held by Elder Ricks. He thought the difficulties of the problem would be best solved by assuming that Zarahemla was located in Honduras in Central America. The Jaredites and Mulekites may, he said, have landed on the east coast of that country, and the Nephites on the west coast. He read tracts from Dr. W.H. Holmes' Handbook of Aboriginal Antiquities, Bulletin 60 of Bureau of American Ethnology, in a corroboration of his views...

Elder B.H. Roberts told of former attempts to clear up difficulties connected with Book of Mormon geography and said the conclusion had always been reached that we do not possess sufficient data

upon which to base a theory of great value. He mentioned a statement to the effect that Lehi landed in South America at about 30° south, which is found in the handwriting of Fred. G. Williams on a piece of paper on which Rev 7. Doc. And Cov. Is also copied. Elder Franklin D. Richards refers to this as a revelation. Elder Roberts said a great deal depends on whether this is revelation or not, and he did not see how that question could be decided offhand. The enormous distances to travel present a serious difficulty. Furthermore, that the contrast between the country Lehi came from and that into which he entered is not once mentioned is, to say the least, very singular. If we were free, the speaker said, from that alleged revelation, it would be easier to reply to adverse critics of the Book of Mormon. The “narrow neck” he thought, we could find just as well at the bay of Honduras or the bay of Tehuantepec. But he was very doubtful of the ability of anybody to make an accurate map of Book of Mormon lands. That book, he said, was not given us for scientific purposes, but to establish true principles and to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ.

Jan. 23. At the meeting of the Book of Mormon Committee Elder ____ Kinki* told of his experience as a member of the Cluff expedition through Central America and northern South America. He said he accepted the alleged revelation as true and believed that the Magdalena river was the Sidon of the Book of Mormon. I had to leave this meeting before elder Kinki finished his address...

Jan 24. A very interesting address was delivered at the meeting of the Book of Mormon committee this morning by Elder Anthon W. Ivins. He said there was ~~only~~ one thing about which all could be united- that the City of Zarahemla was the center of the Nephite civilization and, for aught he knew that city may have been occupied as late as at the time of the Spanish conquest. The explorers of the Magdalena river region, all differed. None of them had found any extensive ruins there. No mountains, he said, were mentioned in the Book of Mormon, and this he thought was singular, if the people were located in the mountain valleys. He did not put a great deal of emphasis on the expression a “narrow neck,” for the configuration of the coast lines in Central America may not have been this same since some centuries ago as it is now. He quoted the description of a volcanic eruption witnessed by Stephens and related in his “Incidents of Travel in Central America” in proof of this. This happened January 25, 1835, when he was off the coast of Nicaragua. He further referred to the architecture of the American aborigines. He said that, as far as he knows there were no pyramids anywhere except in Egypt and Central America. This would indicate some connection between the civilizations of the two countries. He had also found glyphs in American ruins exactly identical with Egyptian characters. Elder Ivins had his theory to advance, but he would say that a strip of land that separates Lake Nicaragua from the Pacific would be a “narrow neck” between the north and south. It is only 15 miles wide and it is practically the only way by which a traveler can pass from one continent to the other except by navigation.

*Asa Kienke.

Appendix C (1879 Book of Mormon Footnotes)

1 Nephi 13:10: And it came to pass that I looked and beheld many waters; and they divided the Gentiles from the seed of my brethren. (Many waters= The Atlantic Ocean)

1 Nephi 13:12: And I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles, who was separated from the seed of my brethren by the many waters; and I beheld the Spirit of God, that it came down and wrought upon the man; and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land. (Man=Columbus)

1 Nephi 13:17: And I beheld that their mother Gentiles were gathered together upon the waters, and upon the land also, to battle against them. (mother Gentiles= The British)

1 Nephi 22:7: And it meaneth that the time cometh that after all the house of Israel have been scattered and confounded, that the Lord God will raise up a mighty nation among the Gentiles, yea, even upon the face of this land; and by them shall our seed be scattered. (mighty nation= The United States, our seed=Lamanites)

Mormon 6:2: And I, Mormon, wrote an epistle unto the king of the Lamanites, and desired of him that he would grant unto us that we might gather together our people unto the land of Cumorah, by a hill which was called Cumorah, and there we could give them battle. (The Hill Cumorah is in Manchester, Ontario co. New York)

Ether 9:3: And the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer departed out of the land with his family, and traveled many days, and came over and passed by the hill of Shim, and came over by the place where the Nephites were destroyed, and from thence eastward, and came to a place which was called Ablom, by the seashore, and there he pitched his tent, and also his sons and his daughters, and all his household, save it were Jared and his family. (Ablom=Probably on the shore of the Eastern United States)

Ether 11:6: And there was great calamity in all the land, for they had testified that a great curse should come upon the land, and also upon the people, and that there should be a great destruction among them, such an one as never had been upon the face of the earth, and their bones should become as heaps of earth upon the face of the land except they should repent of their wickedness. (Heaps of earth= The ancient mounds of N. America)

Ether 15:2: He saw that there had been slain by the sword already nearly two millions of his people, and he began to sorrow in his heart; yea, there had been slain two millions of mighty men, and also their wives and their children. (two millions= including wives and children, the numbers, very probably, must have been from ten to fifteen millions.)

Ether 15:8: And it came to pass that he came to the waters of Ripliancum, which, by interpretation, is large, or to exceed all; wherefore, when they came to these waters they pitched their tents; and Shiz also pitched his tents near unto them; and therefore on the morrow they did come to battle. (Ripliancum= supposed to be Lake Ontario)

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