
The Beginnings of the First LDS Institute of Religion at Moscow, Idaho

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Moscow, Idaho, home to the University of Idaho, is a land-grant university established in 1889. It was here, in 1928, that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints established its first institute of religion. The events preceding the establishment of the first institute, stand as a witness to the faithful contributions of the early Church members in this area who pioneered the institute program. This article highlights key persons and events related to the beginnings of the Moscow Institute.¹

Norma and Zola Geddes entered the University of Idaho as freshmen in the fall of 1925. Born in Baker, Oregon, the girls had lived with their family in Portland, Oregon, and Ogden, Utah, before moving to Winchester, Idaho, a lumbering community in northern Idaho in 1923. Their father, William C. Geddes, was a successful business executive who owned and managed lumber companies in Utah, Oregon, and Idaho.² Faithful to the LDS Church, the family practiced their religion wherever William's business interests took them. However, the isolation of their home in Winchester did not provide the family with the Church association and fellowship they had enjoyed in previous communities in Oregon and Utah. During their formative years in Winchester, Norma and Zola looked forward to attending college in Oregon where there was a larger LDS membership. However, their father, having different ideas, told them, "Either go to the University of Idaho or sit in Winchester and twiddle your thumbs."³ After a few tears, the girls packed their bags for Moscow. Somewhat disappointed, they attended the small Church branch in Moscow, which offered few of the social opportunities they desired.⁴ This would soon

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change with the Church's decision in 1926 to build its first institute of religion.

Founding of Moscow

Located in some of most productive farmland in the United States, historically, Moscow, Idaho, was home to the Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene Indians who gathered in this area each year to harvest the roots of the camas plant. The fur trappers and Christian missionaries of the 1830s were the first outsiders to visit the region. Later, pioneers, looking for new lands outside those already settled in Oregon and eastern Washington, soon discovered the potential of the rich land of western Washington and northern Idaho. In 1871, Almon and Noah Lieuallen left Walla Walla, Washington to become the first to homestead the valley where Moscow, Idaho, would be eventually established.⁵ Other settlers soon followed, among them James Deakin, who played a part in the history of the first institute.

James Deakin, an Irish immigrant, had a reputation as one who always paid cash and avoided the public eye. Born around 1840, he immigrated to America in 1859, and by 1870 lived in New Mexico with a group of single men. Before 1877, he had married a woman named Anna and settled on homestead land near what would become Moscow, Idaho. In 1877, he secured a homestead grant that provided him with ownership of a quarter section of land (160 acres) in the territory of Idaho.⁶

Later, Deakin, Lieuallen, and two other homesteaders each agreed to grant thirty acres of land for organizing a commercial center. This was to be the beginning of a village which became Moscow.⁷ The town grew because of the efforts of local business promoters such as Willis Sweet, who took advantage of the challenges Idaho faced in becoming a state and successfully lobbied to have Idaho's territorial legislature approve Moscow as the site for the first state university.⁸ When it came time to purchase land for the university, James Deakin stepped forward to sell a twenty-acre tract of land for \$4,000. By 1892, the university had its first building and accepted its first students. Soon the university added more buildings to meet the needs of a growing student body.⁹

Beginnings of the LDS Church in Moscow

As members of the LDS Church began moving to the newly discovered farmlands in the Northwest, Elder Edward Stevenson of the Seventy and Matthias F. Cowley accepted the assignment to organize the Church in the area. During their travels, they found no members of the Church in Spokane, Washington, Lewiston, Idaho, or the surrounding area. However, they did find a

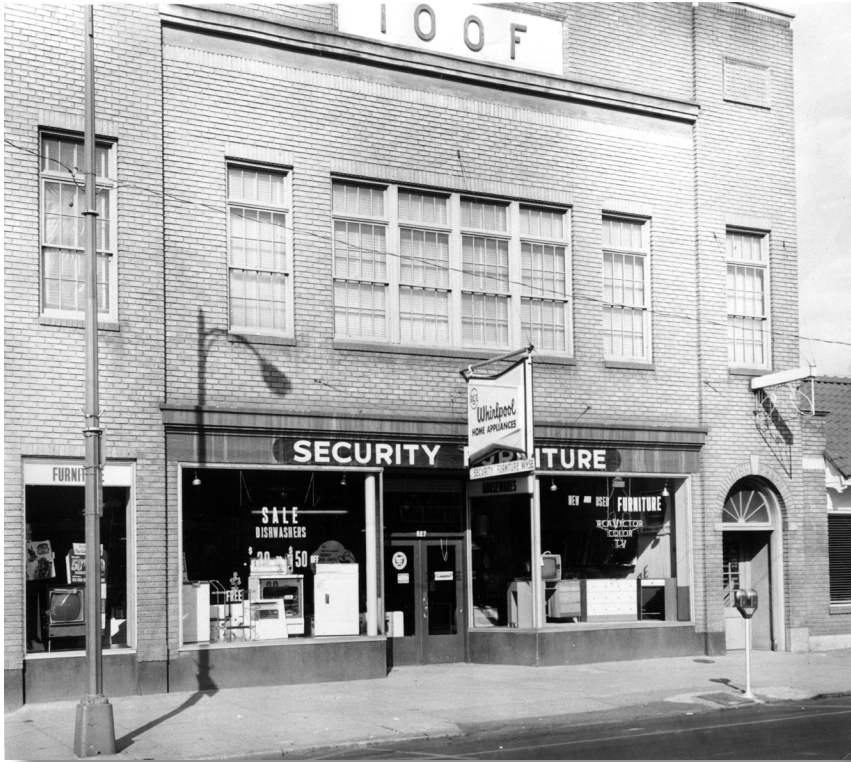
number of Mormons in the lumber camps in Oregon, owned and managed by members of the Church from Utah. This enabled them to organize a branch of the Church in Baker, Oregon, in 1886. A year later, the Northwestern States Mission was organized with headquarters in Baker. Within a short time, missionaries labored throughout this area.¹⁰

In fulfilling their missionary responsibilities, Elders Adelbert A. Pack and Samuel E. Hymus traveled to Moscow, Idaho in 1900. There they stayed with the Andrew Erickson family, who lived outside of the city, and taught them the gospel. The family soon accepted the message and became the first members of the LDS Church in the Moscow area.¹¹ From this beginning, the number of Church members in the area began to grow, largely because of the influence of an increasing number of Mormon students and faculty at the University of Idaho.

In 1908, a dozen members of the Church were associated with the university. Most came from Mormon communities in southern Idaho to attend the university and major in agriculture. These students attended Protestant services each Sunday because there was no formal Mormon Church organization in the community.¹² Feeling the need for a church experience of their own, the students took it upon themselves to organize what they called the “MIA of the University of Idaho.” They met at the home of J. R. Maughan, a married member of the Church attending the university.¹³



The YMCA “Y-Hut,” at the University of Idaho, 1920. The LDS students met here for their MIA meetings. Photograph courtesy of Latah County Historical Society.



International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) hall, 525 South Main, Moscow Idaho. The Moscow Branch of the LDS Church met here for their Sunday meetings. Photograph courtesy Latah County Historical Society.

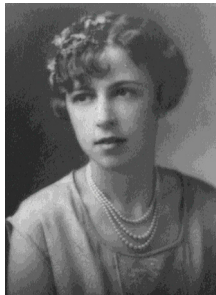
These first efforts met with opposition from local protestant ministers. Missionaries assigned to the area and members of the university faculty, including several who were not LDS, rallied to support the small group. With this encouragement, the group grew large enough to become a Sunday school in 1920, organized under the direction of the Northwestern States Mission. For the next year, they met in the Y-Hut, a YMCA facility built for student activities.¹⁴

As more LDS students and faculty came to Moscow, the Sunday school continued to grow, prompting President Heber C. Iverson of the Northwestern States Mission and John A. Widtsoe of the Twelve to organize the first branch of the Church in Moscow in 1921. Joseph Sudweeks, a university faculty member, became the first branch president. For their Sunday meetings, the small branch rented upstairs space in the community International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) hall, located at Fifth South and Main.

William C. Geddes's Role in the Founding of the Moscow Institute of Religion

Sisters Norma (age eighteen) and Zola Geddes (age twenty) entered the University of Idaho as freshmen in the fall of 1925 and attended church in the Moscow Branch. While disappointed with the size of the group, they faithfully attended church meetings at the IOOF hall.¹⁵ A review of the yearbooks published by the university, illustrates their excellence in athletics, scholarship, and leadership. Norma's membership in Spurs and Mortar Board, both prestigious university honor societies, confirm her academic prowess. She was also a member of the I Club, an athletic honors group, and queen of the 1926 May Festival. Zola excelled as an honor student, served on a variety of committees, and played baseball on the university's women's baseball team. Both sisters were also members of Alpha Chi sorority.¹⁶

William C. Geddes, Norma and Zola's father, was a self-made man who believed that a hard-working, determined individual could achieve great things. With virtually no education, he had worked his way up in the lumber industry until he achieved great success in his business enterprises and community service. Among other honors, two different governors of Idaho appointed him to two separate terms as a member of the university's board of regents. Geddes was also a deeply religious man, but when his only son died unexpectedly, he experienced a crisis of faith. While he continued to read the Book of Mormon regularly, his church participation became irregular. To his daughters, he was at times a forbidding man, accepting only their very best efforts. Yet they never doubted his love for them and realized that he only wanted what he felt was best for them. Motivated by their father's energy, spirit, and expectations, Norma and Zola excelled at the university and responded to the encouragement of their father to excel. When Norma graduated with hon-



L-r: William C. Geddes (1879–1959), Norma Geddes (1908–2001) and Zola Geddes (1906–1977). Photographs courtesy of Barbara G. Mosman of Moscow, Idaho.

ors in 1929, her father was on hand for this special event. When he shook her hand, he remarked without a smile, "I would not have expected any less."¹⁷

In the fall of 1925, during the sisters' freshman year, William Geddes came to Moscow to visit his daughters. On enquiring where the LDS Church services were held, he learned that the members met at the IOOF hall near the downtown Moscow Hotel where he was staying. On Sunday morning, the girls walked from their sorority house to the hotel to meet their father for breakfast. Afterwards, they led him to the IOOF hall and up the narrow stairs to the second floor, where they entered the smelly, dismal hall, rented by the Church for Sabbath meetings. As they did every Sunday morning, they helped sweep the hall to remove stale cigarette butts and pick up the empty bootleg whiskey bottles from the party held in the hall the night before. "It took a hardy soul and a strong desire to attend church," Norma remembered."¹⁸ Their father, appalled by the facility, felt that his daughters should not have to put up with such conditions. Because of his lifetime friendship with Preston Nibley, son of Charles W. Nibley, a member of the LDS Church's First Presidency, William contacted Preston and asked for his help.¹⁹ Preston took the matter to his father, who subsequently invited William to come to Salt Lake City to discuss the matter. At this meeting, William explained that LDS students deserved a strong Church presence at the university. The Church's First Presidency assured William that they would provide a suitable facility for the LDS students attending the university.²⁰ In June 1926, the Church Board of Education approved a building to be built adjacent to the campus, but it was not until February 1928, nearly two years later, that plans were finalized.²¹

This effort complemented those previously made by William J. Wilde and George L. Luke, two LDS members of the university faculty. As early as 1924, these professors, growing concerned that young Mormon students needed increased involvement with the Church, proposed to the university the possibility of allowing the Church to establish an LDS student center adjacent to the campus.²² In response, University of Idaho officials approved the proposal and extended an invitation to establish such a center.²³ Wilde and Luke then explored the feasibility of the university granting credit for classes in religion. Because they won the general support of other members of the university faculty for this idea, in 1925, University of Idaho officials sent a formal proposal to the State Board of Education and Board of Regents.²⁴ This document outlined conditions that would enable the university to grant credit for religious education courses. It is interesting that this proposal came to the board during the same time that they were also wrestling with proposals for LDS released-time seminary in the public high schools.²⁵ On May 30, 1925, the Idaho State Board of Education and Regents approved a document outlin-

ing the conditions and standards that must exist before the university could grant credit for religious education classes. The document specifies:

Conditions

1. That courses in religious education submitted for credit in the University of Idaho shall be offered in Moscow by an incorporated organization which assumes full responsibility for the selection of its instructors and the maintenance of its work in a physical plan adequate for instruction of University grade.
2. That courses offered for University credit shall at all times conform to the following constitutional provision under which the University of Idaho operates: "No instruction either sectarian in religion or partisan in politics shall ever be allowed in any department of the University."
3. That University elective credit of not to exceed eight semester hours may be allowed for such courses.
4. That none but students of sophomore standing or above be allowed to take such course for credit.
5. That students desiring credit for such course shall secure the consent of the dean of their college at the time of registration and that the number of credits for which they are registered be reduced so that the total number of credits taken, including those in religious education shall conform to the University standards.
6. That credit for these courses be granted only upon the recommendation of the Committee on advanced standing.

Standards

1. The instructor shall have a master's degree or its equivalent, and shall possess such maturity of scholarship as is required for appointment to the position of full professor in the University of Idaho.
2. The courses offered shall conform to University standards in library requirements in method and rigor of their conduct.
3. None but students enrolled in the University shall be admitted to these courses, or such other students as are rated by the Registrar of the University as entitled to University standing equivalent to that indicated in the fourth paragraph of "Conditions" above.
4. Classes in religious education shall conform to the University Calendar and to University standards as to length of period.
5. Approval of courses in religious education shall not be granted until they are adequately financed and there is a likelihood of their permanency.
6. Approval of such courses shall be confined to Foundations maintaining at least one instructor devoting not less than half time to such work.
7. The University reserves the right to assure itself from time to time that these conditions and standards are being met.²⁶

Because of this achievement, it is no surprise that the LDS Church leaders and professors in Moscow rallied around William Geddes efforts, offering their support through letters and personal communications in seeking approval from the LDS Church Board of Education for a student facility.²⁷ The First Presidency responded by calling J. Wyley Sessions and his wife to “take care of our students at the University.”²⁸ Sessions commented on his meeting with the First Presidency held September, 26, 1926:

It was generally understood that after our release from the South African Mission that I would be assigned a job in Idaho with the church-controlled Utah-Idaho Sugar Company. After visits to the offices of the First Presidency and the sugar company, I was assured a satisfactory position with the company. . . . When President Heber J. Grant and President Charles W. Nibley were giving me the final instructions; President Nibley suddenly stopped, looked at President Grant, and said, “Heber, we are making a mistake.” President Grant replied, “Yes, I am afraid we are; I have not felt just right about assigning Brother Sessions to the sugar business.”

President Nibley looked at me and said, “Brother Sessions, you are the man to go to Moscow to take care of our students at the University.” I replied, “No, no; are you calling us on another mission?” President Grant chuckled and said, “Of course not; we are giving you the chance to render a great service to the Church, and a fine professional opportunity for yourself.” Sensing my disappointment, President Nibley arose and put his arm around me and said, “Don’t be disturbed, Brother Sessions, this is what the Lord wants you to do.”²⁹

Sessions arrived in Moscow in October 1926, eager to work with university officials in preparing a program and curriculum that would meet the new state standards approved for university level religious education. In one of these discussions, Dr. Jay G. Eldridge, a nonmember professor of German and dean of the faculty, suggested that Sessions should call the building “The Latter-day Saint Institute of Religion.”³⁰ Liking the name, Sessions proposed it to the Church Board of Education, who accepted this title during their regular meeting held April 17, 1928. Sessions then became the first director of the Latter-day Saint Institute of Religion at Moscow, Idaho.³¹



J. Wyley Sessions (1885–1977). Sessions was the director of the first LDS Institute. Photograph courtesy LDS Church Library.

Upon arriving in Moscow, Sessions received a mixed reception from community leaders who felt that the Mormons had sent a representative to the university as part of a political ploy to gather support for moving the university to Boise. Therefore, the Chamber of Commerce appointed a local insurance agent, Fred Fulton, to chair a community committee assigned to watch Sessions and report on his activities.³² To counter this, Sessions joined the Chamber of Commerce and began making friends. His success in associating with this group brought credibility to Sessions, the institute program, and to the Church in general.³³

During this time, Adam S. Bennion, Superintendent of Church Education, and LDS Church President Heber J. Grant visited Moscow and met with local community leaders. They assured the locals that it was the practice of the Church to follow students wherever they went and offer programs in an effort to make religious education part of their university experience. This visit resulted in increased acceptance from the community and trust that the Church was sincere in its efforts to support students and promote the university. A general spirit of good will and cooperation prevailed as the work to establish the institute program moved forward.³⁴

During the fall and spring of 1926–27, Sessions, along with local church leaders, searched for a site near the university for the institute building. Sessions organized a committee consisting of LDS professors William J. Wilde and George L. Luke, and Elmo J. Call, the branch president. They discovered that a suitable property with an older two-story house at the corner of Deacon and University was for sale. When the owners, Arnold and Ella Lyon, learned of the Church's interest, they raised the price to \$8,000—a figure beyond what the committee could pay. Nevertheless, the committee remained interested in purchasing the lot for the new building and sought alternative funding.

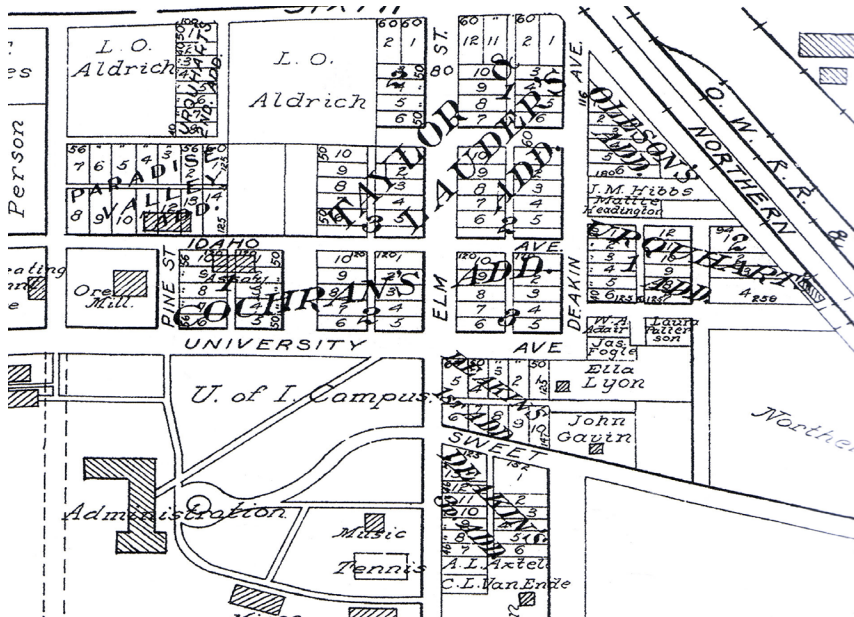
The property was near the university entrance walkway which had been originally part of the James Deakin homestead.³⁵ Deakin had sold two portions of the original homestead in April and September 1891 to Andrew Baxter for a total of \$225 and \$1 respectively. (The Institute would eventually be built on this site.) In turn, Baxter sold one of these two properties to Ella Danly (later Lyon or Lyons) in October 1891 for \$1,350 and to Joseph Baxter 1910 for \$75. Joseph then sold Ella his property in 1911 for \$50. This left Ella and her husband, Arnold Lyon, owning almost all of the land that would become the site for the institute.³⁶

Feeling that Ella and Arnold Lyon had acted unreasonably in escalating the price, Sessions and Call presented a complaint to the Chamber of Commerce. The chair of the Chamber asked Call what he felt was a fair price. Call responded by first explaining how the institute would benefit the community by attracting students from southern Idaho to the university. He then

said he felt that the Church would pay \$2,500–\$3,000 for the property. The chair then offered to pay the balance of \$5,500, if the Church would pay the initial \$2,500. Call excitedly communicated this to Church headquarters. In response, Church President Heber J. Grant wrote to the Chamber and thanked them for their generous offer. Expressing concern for the well-being of businesses in the small university town, he said he felt that the Church should not impose on their kindness, adding that the Church would pay the full amount and enclosed a check for the \$8,000 asked by Lyon for their property and home. The Chamber then assisted in the purchase details.³⁷

On March 5, 1927, Arnold and Ella Danly Lyon sold the two lots to the Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for \$8,000 and \$1 respectively. Three days later, the Church Corporation filed for a quit claim deed from the neighbor, Marie Shannon, for consideration of \$1 to complete the land assembly required for the institute. Sessions recorded the purchases on March 8, 1927, assuming that the purchase of property was legal, which unfortunately it was not.³⁸

Existing documents indicate that sometime after the initial filing and before April of 1927, Latah County declared that the Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints “had not become



Portion of a 1914 map of Moscow, Idaho. Note the location of Ella D. Lyon property that became the site of the Moscow LDS Institute of Religion.

qualified to hold titles to real estate and do business in the State of Idaho.” Apparently, the Church, as a corporation, was able to satisfy Latah County officials, the result being additional documentation to clarify ownership. Thus on April 23, 1927, and again on May 28, 1827, those involved signed the necessary documents to transfer the three lots from Lyon and Shannon to the Church for \$1 each.³⁹ As a result, the Church legally owned the land and prepared to construct the institute building. The Deakin homestead became the original site for the first LDS Institute.

The Church assigned Arthur Price to design the new institute building.⁴⁰ LDS Church Education Commissioner Joseph F. Merrill reviewed the plans and expressed concerns that the suggested design would prove too costly. In dealing with Merrill, Sessions concluded that he was “the most economical, conservative General Authority of this dispensation.”⁴¹ Hearing of the problems with Merrill’s office, the Moscow Chamber of Commerce purchased Sessions a train ticket to travel to Rigby, Idaho, to meet with John Hart and then to Salt Lake to meet with Church President Heber J. Grant. The Chamber proved politically astute because they understood that if John Hart, a Mormon stake president, who was active in Idaho politics, would approve the building costs, it would help persuade Merrill to accept the building plan. Sessions met with Hart, who fully endorsed the proposed institute building. Hart then gained the support of other influential Mormon leaders in the area. Armed with their letters of support, Sessions continued on to Salt Lake for his meeting with President Grant in the Hotel Utah. After speaking with him for less than an hour he felt he had made little progress. With some frustration, Sessions said, “President Grant, I cannot go back to Moscow and build a little Salvation Army shanty at the University of Idaho.”⁴² President Grant laughed, then agreed that the building must be nice. The next day he Sessions met with President Charles W. Nibley, who read a telegram from President Grant that said,



Arthur Price (1874–1977), LDS Church architect, at his desk in 1965. Photograph courtesy Church History Library.



The Moscow LDS Institute of Religion under construction, summer 1928. Photograph courtesy Moscow LDS Institute of Religion, Moscow, Idaho.

“I had a talk yesterday with Bro Sessions. I favor giving him what he wants for our Moscow Seminary building. It must be well done since it is near the campus of the University of Idaho.”⁴³

The Church assigned Howard J. McKean, a contractor who built chapels for the Church, to construct the institute building. The Church Board of Education set a budget of \$60,000 for building construction. At the completion of the project, McKean was able to return \$5,000 to the Church.⁴⁴

The three-story building, constructed in the Tudor-Gothic style, harmonized with the existing university structures. The building consisted of a full basement, a main floor, and a third floor living area. The basement contained a large recreation room, baptismal font, small kitchen, and several small multi-purpose rooms. The main level contained a large chapel with a seating capacity for 225 people, an office, a library, and three large classrooms. The third floor contained eleven well-equipped apartments for twenty-two LDS male students.⁴⁵

As the completion of the building drew near, Sessions set the dedication date for September 26, 1928, and invited public and Church dignitaries.⁴⁶ This date satisfied the university’s request that Sessions schedule the dedication in connection with the inauguration of Frederick J. Kelly as the new university president.⁴⁷ Sessions prepared the following suggested program for President Grant’s consideration.⁴⁸

Music while the people are assembling
 An opening song: congregation. Appropriate music.
 Brief talk: report of the building, and then turn it over to
 Commissioner Merrill for dedication
 Address—about fifteen minutes—by Dr. Merrill
 Address—Dr. W. D. Vincent, Idaho's Commissioner of Education
 Address and Dedicatory Prayer—President Grant
 Music and Benediction
 Following the dedicatory services, inspection of the building.⁴⁹

President Grant accepted the program and assigned his counselor, Charles W. Nibley to preside at the meeting in his absence and offer the dedicatory prayer. In recognition of dedication of the new institute building, the university asked Sessions to arrange for the visiting member of the Church's First Presidency to offer the invocation at the university inauguration ceremony.⁵⁰

As agreed, Sessions scheduled the institute dedication immediately following the two-day university inauguration ceremonies. The institute dedication program began Tuesday afternoon at four p.m. following a campus-wide reception for the new university president. The student newspaper, the *Idaho Argonaut*, covered the dedication service and reported a summary of the remarks made. The report included comments made by "LDS higher education officials" that stressed the need for religious education. The article also quoted President Charles W. Nibley, counselor in the First Presidency, as saying, "The institution is a wonderful plan, a credit to the Church and to the university." The new university president, Frederick J. Kelly, who was unable to attend, provided a written statement that pledged his support for the new institute. He wrote that it was important for "cooperation between school and college and the church in supplementing a student's cultural education with spiritual training."⁵¹ Others attending the dedication included Idaho Governor H. C. Baldrige, and prominent Mormon politicians John W. Hart and Peter G. Johnson from southern Idaho.



J. Wyley Sessions on the steps of the completed Moscow Institute of Religion, summer 1928. Photograph courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.



The completed LDS Moscow Institute of Religion, 1928. Photograph courtesy Moscow LDS Institute of Religion.

Following the dedication, Sessions moved forward in providing classes in the new Institute. He understood that his curriculum must meet previously adopted Idaho State Board of Education standards, which allowed state institutions to grant credit for college-level religious education.⁵² Apparently, the groundwork laid by LDS faculty members had prepared the way for Sessions and the new institute of religion curriculum.

At first, Sessions confessed some confusion because a lack of definite understanding among university and Church leaders on how things should proceed. In a meeting with university president Frederick J. Kelly, Alfred H. Upham, C. W. Chenoweth, and other officials, discussion focused on the ground rules and regulations for institute classes accepted for credit. The university leaders decided that they would accept religious education classes provided Sessions complied with the standards and regulations previously established by the State Board of Education in 1925. After careful review, university leaders accepted for credit eight proposed religious education classes. In recognizing religious education in this manner, a university annual report expressed hope that this would act to “maintain and increase the interest of students in their respective religions” while at the university.⁵³

In June 1928, at the suggestion of Commissioner Merrill, the first courses offered by Sessions were to be Sunday school classes especially for college students. His instructions included the following: “The primary purpose of this Sunday school could be to enable students to become settled in their faith

by harmonizing and reconciling the truth of the Gospel with the truths of science and scholarship that they are learning in college. . . . We suggest that you proceed to arrange such a course to cover thirty or more lectures for the Moscow Sunday School.”⁵⁴

Sessions held his first classes during the fall of 1928 after the dedication exercises.⁵⁵ Around fifty students attended the Sunday classes, as well as the regular morning prayer meetings. As he initiated a move from Sunday to daytime classes, he expressed concern to Commissioner Merrill: “I have been working on a plan for the organization of our Institute and the course we should offer in our weekday classes, [and] I confess that the building of a curriculum for such an institution has worried me a lot and it is a job I feel unqualified for.”⁵⁶ Merrill replied with a helpful definition of the basic philosophy for institute courses.⁵⁷

With this help, the institute would soon expand its Sunday offerings to include regularly scheduled daytime classes and a variety of social activities for the students.⁵⁸ The institute sponsored dances, popular campus wide. The institute students also received recognition for their excellent choir and scholastic awards.⁵⁹ By the time Sessions left Moscow, the institute enrollment had increased to ninety-eight students.⁶⁰

With the new institute building finished and dedicated and the classes active, Norma and Zola Geddes were able to mingle with a growing number of LDS students during their senior year. For their father, William, the building of the institute was what he would later consider his greatest achievement.

Little did James Deakin know that when he registered his homestead in 1877 that his property would become a landmark site for religious education in the LDS Church. It is just as likely that neither William, Norma, and Zola Geddes, J. R. Maughan, Joseph Sudweeks, William J. Wilde, George L. Luke, Elmo J. Call, and J. Wyley Sessions ever envisioned what this institute would mean to the Church they loved. From this humble beginning, the institute program of the Church has grown to cover the globe with over five hundred institute locations serving 150,000 LDS students.⁶¹ These students owe much to these educational pioneers in Moscow, Idaho, whose visionary efforts marked the beginning of the world-wide institute program.

Notes

1. For a more general history of the Moscow LDS Institute of Religion adjacent to the University of Idaho, see Leonard J. Arrington, “The Founding of the L. D. S. Institutes of Religion, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1967): 137–47.

2. William Carver Geddes (1879–1959) was the oldest son of a polygamous father

who died when William was twelve. This event forced William to leave school and support his family by working for the railroad. He attended Oneida Academy in Preston, Idaho, for one year before serving an LDS mission in California. He married Mamie Thompson (1882–1952) and had a family of four daughters. Norma Geddes Greene, *History of William Carver Geddes*, unpublished, copy in possession of Barbara G. Mosman, Moscow, Idaho.

3. Vera White, “University of Idaho campus didn’t roar during 1920’s,” *Moscow Pullman Daily News*, October 28, 1997, 5. See also Norma Geddes Greene, Interview, 1990, LDS Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

4. Norma Geddes Greene, *Personal History*, 1984, manuscript in the possession of Barbara G. Mosman, Moscow, Idaho. See also W. Homer Petersen, *The Mormons on the Palouse: History and Recollections* (Moscow, Idaho: Pullman Washington Stake, 1987).

5. Julie R. Monroe, *Moscow: Living and Learning on the Palouse* (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 7.

6. 1870 U. S. Federal Census, Colfax, New Mexico Territory; 1880 U. S. Federal Census, Nez Perce, Idaho; and United States of America, Homestead Certificate, No. 8, Application 21, granted October 13, 1877, recorded October 25, 1880, Book U, 129, Latah County Recorder’s Office, Moscow, Idaho.

7. Monroe, *Moscow*, 33.

8. Willis Sweet (1856–1925) was a Moscow, Idaho, lawyer who was successful in promoting the community and the University of Idaho. He also served as United States attorney for Idaho and later as associate justice of the Idaho Supreme Court. When Idaho became a state, Sweet served as a member of the University of Idaho’s Board of Regents, and an Idaho representative to Congress. Rafe Gibbs, *Beacon for Mountain and Plain: The Story of the University of Idaho* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1972), 13–19.

9. Idaho became a territory in 1866 with the capital located in Lewiston. In 1874, the territorial legislature moved the capitol to Boise. At that time, southern forces in the territory pressed to organize a university in Boise. However, the struggling territory lost interest in a university until 1887, when a proposal came from Mormon-dominated eastern Idaho to establish the university in Idaho Falls. Representatives from northern Idaho opposed, demanding instead that the university be in the northern part of the state. The struggle for statehood prevented further action. However, when Willis Sweet gathered the political support necessary to reelect Fred T. Dubois as territorial governor, he used this influence to lobby for locating the university in Moscow. After much political intrigue, the bill passed the legislature placing the university in Moscow. Members of the legislature described this action as an “olive branch” in an attempt to heal the rift between northern and southern Idaho. Willis reported the good news to the citizens of Moscow January 1889. When Idaho became a state on July 3, 1890, the university gained land-grant status under federal Morrill Act. Gibbs, *Beacon for the Mountain Plain*, 13–23.

10. Peterson, *The Mormons on the Palouse*, 3.

11. Peterson, *The Mormons on the Palouse*, 4.

12. Besides the Erickson family, another LDS family lived in the area, namely the George Holden family. But they lived in the rural area outside Moscow and were unknown to the university students who were members of the Church.

13. Joseph Sudweeks, *Latter-day Saint Church Relations in Moscow, Idaho, 1928, First Period, 1908–1912*, manuscript, LDS Church History Library. Sudweeks attended the university first as a student 1908–1912, and later returned in 1920 as a member of the faculty.

14. Joseph Sudweeks, *Latter-day Saint Church Relations in Moscow, Idaho 1928*,

Second Period, 1920–1923, LDS Church Archives.

15. Vera White, “A place for Mormons at UI,” *Moscow Pullman Daily News*, October 28, 1997, 2.

16. Associated Students, University of Idaho, *The Gem of the Mountains* (Moscow, Idaho: University of Idaho, 1926, 1927, and 1928).

17. Barbara G. Mosman, Interview, by the author, July 11, 2008.

18. Norma Geddes Greene, Interview, 1970, LDS Church History Library.

19. Preston Nibley served as William Geddes’s branch president in their early days in Portland, Oregon. They remained fast friends throughout their life. Preston Nibley was a prominent Church author, a member of the General Church YWMIA board, and Assistant Church Historian. See Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 850–51.

20. During this time, several LDS professors at the University of Idaho had sent letters to the Church Board of Education requesting the building of a Church student center. This prompted the board to consider the matter of building a student facility adjacent to the University of Idaho campus. William E. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Printing Company, 1998), 48–49.

21. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education*, 49. It is interesting to note that when approval was given for a building at Moscow, the suggestion was made to appoint J. Wyley Sessions to direct the effort, who had yet to return from his mission in South Africa.

22. General Church leaders had discussed the need for a religious education program for university students as early as 1912. A committee investigating the matter concluded that this would create a burden on the students. In 1915, Church leaders again discussed the request of officials at the University of Utah. However, the matter was not addressed until 1925 when Geddes visited from Idaho. See Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education*, 47–48; also “Sharing the Light: History of the University of Idaho LDS Institute of Religion, 1926–1976,” LDS Church History Library.

23. The LDS professors received the approval with great interest. Included in the group was Elmo Call, a local physician who was serving as branch president. John L. Schwendiman, a student, claimed that Call led the effort. As part of a larger effort, they had also rented a home in an attempt to provide a place for students, but this had not worked out. John L. Schwendiman, *Personal Recollections*. Schwendiman attended the University of Idaho beginning in 1927 and later served as the LDS stake president in the area in 1974. See also, *Memory Book for the 75th Anniversary of the Founding of the Moscow Institute of Religion: A Brief History of the Moscow Institute of Religion* (Moscow, Idaho: n. p., 2001), 2, on file at the Moscow Institute of Religion, Moscow, Idaho.

24. The university saw this as a way to attract more LDS students from southern Idaho. Because they recognized that many of these potential students were LDS, they reasoned that a Church presence on campus would encourage these students to enroll in the university.

25. Apparently, the board saw the proposal from the University of Idaho faculty as being much more reasonable than the requests for released-time seminary in the public schools. However, eventually the board did approve released-time seminary, but left it to the districts for implementation.

26. Meeting of the State Board of Education and the Board of Regents of the University of Idaho held at Moscow in the Office of the President of the University of Idaho, May 30, 1925, Idaho State Historical Society Archives, Boise, Idaho. The final statement was based on the proposal from the university faculty.

27. Arrington indicates in his article that it was a “Macedonian call for help” to the

First Presidency that came from LDS professors at the University of Idaho. Arrington, "The Founding of the L. D. S. Institutes of Religion," 140.

28. James Wyley Sessions, Interview, 1972, LDS Church Archives, also cited in Arrington, "The Founding of the L. D. S. Institutes of Religion," 140. James Wyley Sessions (1885–1977) spent his early career as an agricultural specialist. Following his call to preside over the South Africa mission from 1921–1926, the First Presidency called him to initiate the Church's institute program in Moscow, Idaho. Following this, he inaugurated other institute programs in Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah. He later served as the president of the Missionary Home in Salt Lake City and as the first head of the Brigham Young University Division of Religion (1939). He finished his career in real estate development in Los Angeles. See Garr, et. al., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, 1090.

29. James Wyley Sessions, Interview; also cited in Arrington, "The Founding of the L. D. S. Institutes of Religion," 140.

30. Arrington, "The Founding of the L. D. S. Institutes of Religion," 142. Elder Joseph F. Merrill, Apostle and Church commissioner of education accepted this title. Significantly, Dr. Jay G. Eldridge remained interested in the institute as evidenced by a March 15, 1928, entry in his personal journal indicating he had attended a meeting to hear J. Wyley Sessions speak about the "Mormon seminary." Then in April of the same year, Eldridge described the visit of three students who had complaints about the "Mormon house." Eldridge explained to the girls that it was too late to try to do anything about the building because it was already underway. Jay G. Eldridge, Papers, University of Idaho Special Collections, Moscow, Idaho.

31. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education*, 48.

32. The committee consisted of ministers, businessmen, and university faculty. They feared that Sessions would try to "Mormonize" the university and prepare the way for the transfer of the agricultural college to Boise. Sessions, Interview.

33. J. Wyley Sessions to Ward H. Magleby, December 29, 1967, J. Wyley Sessions Collections, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

34. Joseph F. Merrill replaced Adam S. Bennion in 1928 as the head of the Church's educational program. The title was changed at that time from superintendent to commissioner.

35. This walkway still exist and leads to the traditional "hello walk." This hundred-year-old walkway leads from the edge of campus to the old administration building at the heart of campus.

36. See the following deeds: Deakin to Baxter, recorded April 27, 1891, and September 18, 1891; Baxter to Danly, recorded October 1, 1891; and Baxter to Danly, recorded September 15, 1911; Latah County, Idaho, Office of the County Assessor, Moscow, Idaho.

37. J. Wyley Sessions to Ward H. Magleby, December 29, 1967.

38. See the following deeds: Danly and Lyon to the Corporation, March 5, 1927; and Shannon to the Corporation, March 8, 1927; Latah County, Idaho, Office of the County Assessor, Moscow Idaho. The university student newspaper, the *Idaho Argonaut*, covered the building of the institute. The March 6, 1928 issue reported the work on the "LDS seminary" would start soon, and that the several frame structures on the property were to be removed. In the April 10, 1928, issue, the paper reported that the excavation work had begun, but the curriculum of the "seminary" was being worked out with the university.

39. See Instrument number 116894, Book 90, 18, 42, 43, Latah County, Idaho, Office of the County Assessor, Moscow Idaho. This development is puzzling because the Church Corporation held considerable property in southern Idaho. Don Roberts, Lewiston, Idaho,

city attorney, suggested that this action might have been the result of the long-standing political rift between northern and southern Idaho and the lingering suspicions regarding the Mormon political block in eastern Idaho. Because of this, it is possible that Latah County officials acted on biased assumptions until corrected regarding of the standing of the Church corporation in Idaho. However, the truth of the matter remains unknown.

40. Both the *Idaho Argonaut* and Sessions identify Price as the architect. See *Idaho Argonaut*, March 6, 1928; and Sessions, Interview. Arthur Price (1874–1971) served as the head architect for the Church. He worked under the direction of Willard Young, who served as superintendent of building construction for the Church. His most famous work was the Arizona Temple located in Mesa, Arizona.

41. Sessions, Interview.

42. Sessions, Interview.

43. Sessions, Interview.

44. S. H. Skinner, a local Moscow contractor, received the contract to dispose of the existing buildings on the property. *Idaho Argonaut*, April 10, 1928.

45. History of the Moscow Institute of Religion (1976), LDS Church History Library; also *Idaho Argonaut*, August 18, 1928. Norma Geddes Greene reported that the Institute had a difficult time filling all the apartments and began renting them to nonmember male students. After a difficult experience with drinking in the apartments, the Institute policy changed to allow only LDS students to live in the apartments. White, “A place for Mormons at UI,” 2. Greene also reported that the dances held in the recreation hall were popular across campus. White, “University of Idaho campus did not roar during 1920’s,” 5.

46. J. Wyley Sessions to W. R. Sloan, September 11, 1928, copy, Moscow Idaho Institute of Religion historical file, Moscow, Idaho, copy in possession of the author. Sloan was president of the Northwestern States Mission, headquartered in Portland, Oregon. The letter also invited President Sloan to organize a branch in Moscow associated with the Institute.

47. J. Wyley Sessions to W. D. Vincent, September 8, 1928, copy, Moscow Idaho Institute of Religion historical file, Moscow, Idaho, copy in possession of the author. Vincent was state commissioner of education.

48. J. Wyley Sessions to Heber J. Grant, September 15, 1928, copy, Moscow Idaho Institute of Religion historical file, copy in possession of the author.

49. J. Wyley Sessions to Heber J. Grant, September 15, 1928, copy, Moscow Idaho Institute of Religion historical file, copy in possession of the author.

50. Sessions, Interview. When Nibley did not arrive in time to offer the prayer, the university officials asked John Hart, an LDS stake president and a southern Idaho LDS political leader in attendance, to offer the prayer. Sessions stated that it was a “straight forward Mormon type prayer” that had a considerable impact on those in attendance.

51. *Idaho Argonaut*, October 2, 1928.

52. J. Wyley Sessions, “The Latter-day Saint Institutes,” *Improvement Era* 38, no. 7 (July 1935): 412.

53. Idaho Bulletin of Education, *State of Idaho 8th Biennial Report of the State Board of Education and Board of Regents of the University of Idaho, 1927–1928* (Boise, Idaho: State of Idaho Board of Education, n. d.), 66. C. W. Chenoweth was a philosophy professor at the university and a minister of a small congregation in Moscow. During WWI, he had served as a military chaplain. Sessions began a master’s program under Dr. Chenoweth and they became friends. Sessions invited him to speak at a leadership conference held at Ricks College, Rexburg, Idaho. Chenoweth was both impressive in his presentation and impressed with the Latter-day Saint students. He became a supporter of the new LDS institute. Sessions, Interview.

54. Joseph F. Merrill to J. Wylie Sessions, June 6, 1928, as cited in Ward H. Magleby, "1926 Another Beginning Moscow Idaho: A Solid Foundation is Laid for the Institute Program," *Impact: Weekday Religious Education Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1968): 27, 31. See also Barrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education*, 51.

55. According to the university report, there were 90 Mormon students on campus out of a student body of less than 2,000. Idaho Bulletin of Education, *State of Idaho 7th Biennial Report of the State Board of Education and Board of Regents of the University of Idaho, 1925–1926* (Boise, Idaho: State of Idaho Board of Education, n. d.), 67.

56. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education*, 51.

57. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education*, 51.

58. "Sister Sessions, herself a teacher and candidate for a Master's degree in counseling, devised a varied program of cultural and social activities. The scattered LDS students living in University dormitories and in off-campus residences were this brought together in a fellowship program which enriched their lives." Arrington, "Founding of the L. D. S. Institutes of Religion," 142–43.

59. Norma Geddes Greene, Interview.

60. *Idaho Argonaut*, August 18, 1928. This issue reported that the construction was nearly complete and would be ready for classes to be taught during the fall semester. The reporter said that the purpose of the building was to "maintain a university school of religion, offering courses in Bible history, Bible literature, ethics and comparative religion."

61. Statistics provided on the LDS Church Educational website, <http://institute.lds.org/faq/index.asp>, accessed August 5, 2008.