

THE MARTIN HARRIS FESTIVAL, 1875-1996

Rhett Stephens James

FESTIVALS

The idea and practice of festivals lives in the Latter-day Saint Christian community. Elder L. Tom Perry of the Council of the Twelve Apostles in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints spoke of "festivals" in his General Conference address on October 4, 1987. Elder Perry was "especially fascinated with the parallelism between the Hebrew nation and our own Church history." He observed that "traditions preserved the religious faith and strengthened the spiritual fiber of the people of Israel." Elder Perry saw the same function active among Latter-day Saints in the "celebrations of Christmas and Easter, our annual Pioneer Day observance, events commemorating the restoration of the Aaronic and the Melchizedek priesthoods, the Relief Society birthday parties, and pageants--all cause us to remember our spiritual heritage and increase our gratitude to the Lord for all He does for us."¹

Elder Perry added, "celebrating important historical events perpetuates" important spiritual, political, cultural, and social traditions, and encourages the study of history. "We build bridges between the present and the past," he explained, "and bring relevance and interest to our study of history. When we celebrate, we remember. Sometimes we reenact that which has gone on before. When we honor tradition, we actually do what our ancestors did." The Latter-day Saint apostle hoped continued commemoration of historical events would continue to reclaim celebrated traditions, reaffirming spiritual, political, cultural, and social values. "We learn from ancient Israel that there is a place for commemorative events. Let us build in our families, communities, and nations traditions of a lasting nature that will consistently remind us of the Lord's eternal truths and of our forebears who preserved them for our day." The LDS apostle called for keeping alive Latter-day Saint Christianity's "rich heritage" as a constant reminder of "our standards and our values."²

On March 31, 1990, at the 160th Annual General Conference held in Salt Lake City, Elder Perry repeated his encouragement to Latter-day Saints to build and preserve meaningful festivals and traditions. Again referring to how

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festivals blessed Israel with continuity amid change, he said, "The Lord has not been so explicit in providing us religious customs along the orders of feasts and festivals to remind us of the blessings we receive from Him today. However," he taught, "the practice of having traditions to keep us close to the great heritage which is ours to enjoy should be something every family should try to keep alive."³ An example of a relatively new Mormon festival is the Martin Harris pageant in Smithfield, Utah.

ONE FESTIVAL'S ROOTS

June 1829 in the woods near Peter Whitmer's home in Fayette, Seneca County, New York, Martin Harris (Jeffersonian, businessman, philanthropist) became a special witness of the Book of Mormon.⁴ Harris saw and heard the angel Moroni, who showed him the golden plates, from which the Book of Mormon was translated, and other ancient artifacts mentioned in the holy book.⁵ In 1874-75, Martin Harris told William Pilkington that he saw the angel ascend into heaven, saw his Savior Jesus Christ, and heard the voice of God the Father.⁶ The ultimate confirmation of the authenticity of the sacred record came when Harris heard God tell him that Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon was correct. Jesus Christ then commanded him to testify of what he saw and heard.⁷ Joseph Smith remembered that Martin Harris called out in "an ecstasy of joy, 'Tis enough; mine eyes have beheld; mine eyes have beheld'; and jumped up, shouting 'Hosanna,' blessing God, and otherwise rejoicing exceedingly."⁸ Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer had experienced the same heavenly manifestation shortly before Joseph Smith's and Martin Harris's joint theophany.

MARTIN HARRIS'S BURIAL--A FESTIVAL BEGINS

Latter-day Saint Christian burials are celebrations. They center in the belief that the individual spirit never dies, and a bodily resurrection-restoration awaits.⁹ After Martin Harris died in Clarkston, Utah Relief Society sisters sewed his burial clothes. Clarkston and Newton carpenters built his casket from pine lumber harvested west of their towns. Harris was placed in his casket, a Book of Mormon in his right hand, a Doctrine and Covenants in his left¹⁰ to

symbolically commemorate his role in financing and helping publish the first editions of both Latter-day Saint scriptures.¹¹ Parents brought children to see the Witness lying in state, and carefully taught the next generation the importance of the man they saw buried.¹²

The Martin Harris funeral happened on July 12, 1875. Brigham Young requested that his close friend William F. Rigby, Bishop of Newton and a former Clarkston bishop, preach Harris's funeral sermon. The large crowd paid every respect to Harris. A sixteen wagon procession followed the casket wagon up the hill to the Clarkston Cemetery north of town. Martin Harris was buried in the Russell King Homer family plot where local citizens and friends filled in the grave. A wooden marker was set in place. Martin Harris's name, birth, age place and date of death, and the words, "One of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon," were carved into the marker along with the testimony of the Three Witnesses as found in every Book of Mormon.¹³

In the years that followed, any burial in the Clarkston Cemetery often ended with a community visit to the grave of Martin Harris, a visit intended to bring to mind what he said, his witness of the Book of Mormon, and to spark those who heard him speak in person to repeat his witness to another generation. Clarkston traditions tell of Harris's grave becoming a place visited by Clarkston citizens from time to time as they visited the graves of their family. Even today one will often find flowers at his grave, placed there by an unknown hand.¹⁴

Martin Harris lived in the middle of controversy during much of his long life. In death, even his burial caused controversy. Who would control and direct the celebrations of Martin Harris's message? The Witness's many friends in Smithfield felt that Harris should be buried in their town where he lived for four years. In the 1880s, Smithfield Latter-day Saints talked of moving Harris's remains to the Smithfield Cemetery where they felt they could provide a more suitable monument. Clarkston's wood marker did not last long and had been replaced by a cedar post.¹⁵

When George Godfrey, the Clarkston Cemetery Sexton, heard of the Smithfield plan, he and his son used a team of horses and a chain to pull one of the old church house stone steps out to the grave. They leveled the grave and placed the stone on top. Larger than the grave, the stone can still be seen level with the cemetery lawn in front

of the monument. A new sandstone marker three or four feet high was set to mark the grave. The Smithfield movement to move Martin Harris's remains ended.¹⁶ The incident itself confirmed the respect with which Harris was held in Cache Valley

On March 15, 1906, the First Presidency and Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints read a letter from Clarkston's Bishop Ravsten reporting that Harris's grave headstone was worn and the base was gone. The Latter-day Saint leaders decided to erect a granite monument.¹⁷ The project was delayed due to financial limitations and other pressing business.

In the meantime, according to Clarkston tradition, a local Clarkstonite named William (Bill) Clark, upset over the deteriorated condition of Harris's grave marker, and feeling that the Witness ought to be shown more respect, went to the cemetery and pushed the old tombstone off the grave. He confessed to fellow Clarkston Mormons in a Clarkston church meeting, asking forgiveness, but extorted his brothers and sisters to show more respect to a true witness of God's work on the earth. The desired effect resulted. The Clarkston Ward Sunday School spear-headed a local citizen collection. Sufficient money was raised to purchase a white limestone marker engraved with a Book of Mormon. Harris's new headstone was shipped to Cache Junction from the quarry used to supply rock from the Manti Temple. A Brother Parry engraved the marker. George Godfrey transported it to the Harris grave, and with other local citizens set the stone. The inscription on the stone was significant: "Martin Harris, one of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, Born May 18, 1783, died July 10, 1875. Subscribed for by his numerous friends."¹⁸

The possibility of constructing a more permanent Martin Harris memorial was again discussed at a meeting of the First Presidency and Twelve on July 31, 1913. Periodic visits to Cache Valley by church leaders brought them into contact with the desires of local citizens to make the burial place of Martin Harris a point of historical interest. In Salt Lake City, minutes of the earlier March 15, 1906 First Presidency and Twelve decision were reviewed. On President Lyman's motion the two quorums decided to recommend that the Martin Harris granite headstone project be carried out under the direction of the First Presidency.¹⁹

The history-telling tradition continued. In the next ten years, the ongoing interest of LDS members about the testimony and life of Martin Harris remained. Those who

had heard Martin Harris's personal testimony spoke in Latter-day Saint congregations. The accumulative effect strengthened religious convictions and helped educate another generation of LDS adults and youth about Joseph Smith, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and the place and function of living witnesses in testifying of God's work. Into the first decades of the twentieth century many Latter-day Saints worked long hours on farms and enjoyed little formal schooling. Oral communication existed as the principal way for transmitting gospel doctrine and history. To hear persons who heard first generation church history participants was counted both a privilege and an authentic way of learning church history, but always appropriately secondary to the teachings of the living Latter-day apostles and prophets. Martin Harris and his grave became a touchstone for many participating in orthodox Latter-day Saint oral traditions.

HEAR THE HISTORY TELLERS

Martin Harris asked those with whom he spoke to repeat his witness and story wherever they went, wherever they lived, to the end of their days.²⁰ Many persons took Harris's solemn request as a personal responsibility to pass his knowledge on to the next generation, and they did so. William Pilkington, William Homer, Ole Jensen, James Keep, George Godfrey, John Godfrey, Thomas Godfrey, Charley Shumway, John Buttars, Alma Jensen, Annie Jardine, Sarah Clark, William Gale, and Charlie Harris were but a few.²¹

The history telling experiences for each of these persons were much the same. In the community of Cache Valley Latter-day Saints, people knew who had heard Martin Harris. This knowledge was often transmitted in the traditional Latter-day Saint monthly Fast and Testimony meetings. In these sacred assemblies Latter-day Saints tell others how it is that they believe and know the gospel of Jesus Christ is true. As Cache Valley LDS people migrated outside their valley, in the normal process of time, their knowledge of Martin Harris and the identity of those who heard him spread as far away as Toronto, Canada; Arizona, California, and elsewhere.

As Latter-day Saint congregations in other communities learned where the history tellers lived, invitations were extended to speak in sacrament meetings and other church assemblies. Latter-day Saint communities enjoy a rich social dynamic of socials and "firesides" outside Sabbath and other official church meetings.

Refreshments and conversation usually followed the history teller's sharing and gave opportunity to informally discuss and share what one had heard Martin Harris say. History tellers rarely if ever announced availability for such speaking assignments, but did respond to invitations.

The persons who heard Martin Harris were more often than not members of large families. Family members who moved to Washington, Oregon, Montana, California, Arizona, and other locations eventually repeated what they had heard a family member recount about having heard Martin Harris. This dynamic not only took place within families, but extended to faithful Latter-day Saint non-family members. In this way a second, third, and now a fourth generation repeated Martin Harris's testimony in increasingly distant LDS locations.

Take the case of the young boy William "Willie" Pilkington, who was hired by Martin Harris, Jr., to assist his aging father in his last years. "Willie" Pilkington was in his fifteenth year when Martin Harris, who was nearly 93 years old, died on July 10, 1875. So many requests came to Pilkington between 1934 and 1935 to tell his experiences with Harris that it became difficult for him to attend his home ward congregational meetings.²² Accounts collected from families attending the Martin Harris Pageant since 1983 tell of Pilkington and other history tellers traveling in Brigham City, into southern Idaho, into Bear Lake Country, into Star Valley, Wyoming, and as far south as Ogden.

Pilkington received so many invitations to relate his experiences with Martin Harris, LDS Church President Heber J. Grant of the LDS Church was concerned that Pilkington's regular church activity would be disrupted. Lest he be perceived as stepping beyond his authority and stewardship in the church, Pilkington asked President Grant for an endorsement. President Grant declined because of the precedent such an action might establish--the possible destabilizing of lay ministerial duties within congregations. Nevertheless, President Heber J. Grant encouraged William Pilkington to bear witness of the truth of the restoration of the gospel to as many as possible the same as all elders of the church should.²³

In 1937, William Pilkington remembered that for 37 years he had lectured in the congregations of the Latter-day Saints, keeping his promise made to Martin Harris that he would repeat the Witness's testimony.²⁴ William Pilkington accepted speaking invitations as late as December 31, 1939.²⁵ He deposited his autobiography and his record of

having heard Martin Harris with the LDS Church's Historical Department in Salt Lake City to ensure his knowledge be passed on after his death on June 25 1942. William Pilkington was buried in Smithfield, Utah, on June 28, 1942.²⁶

Pilkington was also known to have provided letters recounting his special knowledge. On one such occasion, Mrs. L. J. Merrill of Smithfield, Utah, sent a William Pilkington witness letter, dated April 10, 1927, inside an envelope postmarked November 12, 1927, from a Mrs. L. J. Merrill of Smithfield, Utah, addressed to a Miss Alice Merrill living in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.²⁷ It is believed by the Gale family that William Pilkington's April 10 letter eventually came into the possession of William Carl Gale while serving in the LDS Northwestern States Mission between 1932 and 1933. William Gale took the William Pilkington letter home to Franklin, then Duncan Greenlee County, Arizona. In the years that followed, William Gale retold the miracle of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and Martin Harris's testimony, using William Pilkington's letter. Gale developed a teaching curriculum and a collection of miniature Book of Mormon visual aids used in his fireside lectures. Gale passed his Book of Mormon teaching materials, including the April 10, 1927 William Pilkington letter, on to his son W. Adrian Gale "in the summer of 1984, one year before he passed away."²⁸

On Saturday, April 6, 1996, W. Adrian and Katherine Gale, with their married daughters Teresa Falslev, Janalee Thomas, and Melece Flinders, were sorting through boxes of family memorabilia stored in their basement. Teresa discovered the William Pilkington April 10, 1927 letter inside her grandfather William Gale's Book of Mormon.²⁹

THE GRAVE MATTER

The act of retelling Martin Harris's testimony kept the subject of his grave in the minds of Clarkston citizens and church leaders in Cache Valley. The July 1924 Centennial Celebration in Cache Valley brought Martin Harris and his grave into the forefront of Cache Valley news. Merlin R. Hovey, Secretary of the Logan Boosters Club (later the Cache Chamber of Commerce), looked for subjects of local interest to advertise as tourist attractions. He saw the Martin Harris grave in Cache Valley as an opportunity to benefit the community generally. Preceding the 1924 celebration, in an effort to heighten local awareness of valley points of interest, Hovey "wrote weekly

sketches for the Logan Journal" about early Cache Valley settlements.³⁰ Martin Harris was highlighted.

Hovey visited Harris's grave and found a cemetery surrounded by "a broken-down wire fence with tumble weeds, cockleburs, and other weeds all over the cemetery." Graves, including Martin Harris's, were not fenced in and were grazed by livestock. He took a picture of the "white marble headstone," thinking his was "the only. . . picture" of the marker.³¹

Merlin Hovey learned that Martin Harris had no near relative or relatives in Clarkston, Logan, or in Cache Valley. Knowing that "the First Presidency of the LDS Church had already given some attention to the graves of the other Witnesses to the Book of Mormon," the well-intentioned city promoter determined to take the initiative to recommend that Church officials "provide a suitable monument" for Martin Harris's grave with intent of making it "an attraction." Hovey's plan was to see Harris's grave moved to the "Logan Tabernacle grounds or the Temple Grounds."³²

Hovey did not realize that a cultural celebration was already in place among the Clarkston people. Control of what was done and not done with Martin Harris's grave was centered in Harris's "numerous friends" still in the community, people who had heard his witness personally, families who had sat up with him when he was ill, people who befriended him, and buried him with the highest honors they could afford, people who replaced his grave stone, and defended his grave from well-meaning outsiders who would move it.

Merlin Hovey contacted a Logan grave digger, Joseph H. Watkins, who enthusiastically "agreed to do the exhuming." Hovey reported that Watkins outlined how it "could be done with little disturbance of the remains." Hovey remembered with a sense of humor that "he and I in our minds had the project already accomplished. Watkins considered the opportunity to serve a great honor and there would be no cost,"³³ remembering that Martin Harris had donated the money for the publication of the first Book of Mormon in 1830. Joseph Watkins was willing to emulate the ideal, charging nothing.

Hovey and other Logan Boosters wrote to as many Harris relatives as they could find. It was not long before the Clarkstonites heard about the proposed move of Harris's remains. Clarkston Bishop Ben Ravsten received a letter to

This is to certify that a William Pilkington was
 born in Bristol, Somerset, England, on the 15th day
 of December 1860.
 John, William appears and eleven months of age, during
 with me, and I immediately got employment with
 in Bristol 1874. I immediately got employment with
 in London, where I was born, but the following
 month moved to Blackheath, South County, Bristol.
 I soon found out that William there was one of the
 three children of the Englishman, the sister of William
 was born in the same house with the wife and family.
 Thus it became my good lot to have the privilege of looking
 and having the privilege of seeing with my own eyes
 had been placed at first in the sight of some persons
 to be chosen as one of the three men that were in the
 possession of an Arab of God, who held in his hands
 the golden plates that the English people had discovered
 with the English men, which contains the contents of
 what is now called the Book of Mormon by the Church
 of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I took great pleasure
 in listening to him while he took in the copy
 use of the Church, then he stood in the presence of the
 English of the and, and after the long and painful
 I have to say the brethren you and heard the story of the
 believe that something was true that the English had from
 and that the story of Mormon was true and certainly.

Amos A. Phelps
 April 10th 1927

Letter written by William Pilkington, dated April 10, 1927.
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I lived with him nine months prior to his death
which took place in Clarkston, Cache County, Utah.
July 10th 1875.

I testify to the whole world that I held up his right
hand while he bore his last and dying testimony, that
he with the Prophet Joseph Smith did stand in the
presence of an angel of the Lord while he held the
Golden Plates in his hands, and that he saw the
Engravings on the Plates, and after the angel ascended
up into Heaven the Heavens were opened and he heard
the voice of God declare that everything the angel had
told them was very true, and that the Book of Mormon
which contains the fullness of the Everlasting Gospel was
translated correctly.

Signed, Willard P. Kimpton
Smithfield, Cache County, Utah.

July 10 → $\frac{1955}{1875}$
80 years

“see if he or the people had any objections to the move.” Hovey recorded that before long the topic of moving Martin Harris became the principal “topic of Clarkston and spread to other communities. There were pros and cons on all sides.”³⁴

Hovey consulted the LDS valley stake presidencies, and reported that they supported the plan, but suggested Latter-day Saint President and Prophet Heber J. Grant and his counselors be consulted. In their view, permission from the First Presidency would settle the matter. Doing so might “also get the Presiding Authorities of the Church” to provide a suitable monument for Martin Harris’s grave. President Grant wisely said he favored “the project provided the Clarkston people had no objections.” One of his counselors, President Charles W. Penrose, opposed the project: “Let the dead stay dead where they are.”³⁵

Failing to discern the caution from the First Presidency, Hovey and company journeyed to Clarkston, determined to convince the Clarkstonites to pass control of Martin Harris’s care to Logan City. The meeting was scheduled for a Sabbath evening in the LDS Clarkston Church house. The two stake presidencies H. Budge and C. M. Christensen, Joseph E. Cardon and George W. Lindquist went in one automobile. Logan Mayor John A. Crockett, Logan Booster President W. Howell, grave digger Joseph H. Watkins, and Merlin Hovey traveled in a second automobile. Hovey reported, “Mayor Crockett said he felt that we were going to get a ‘dam good licking.’ Hovey wrote, “He knew pretty well the temper of the Clarkston people and particularly Bishop Ravsten, a large raw-boned Scandinavian with a Dutch hair crop.”³⁶

The LDS Loganites arrived to find “buggies, wagons, and autos” surrounding the square where the church stood. “Young folks” sat “in the windows of the meeting house.” Hovey wrote: “We knew then that we had a full house and the bishop for once could report a hundred per cent attendance of his entire ward.” The Logan outsiders entered the building feeling “dampened” and “drowned” by a “serious and very quiet” congregation.

The meeting began. Bishop Ravsten “stated the purpose of the meeting and asked our side to present its case,” Hovey wrote. Ben Ravsten’s use of the words “our side” suggested the mood of the occasion. Stake presidents Budge and Cardon, feeling “very meek,” presented the committee’s “feelings and plans in regard to the project. They were not long on their feet,” Hovey wrote. Bishop

Ravsten “took the floor” with a great deal more energy. “Very solemn,” the Clarkston bishop “related how Martin Harris was brought to Clarkston, how Harris lived there, how he was befriended” by Clarkston people, and how, when the Witness became ill, the people nursed “him along until he died.” Ravsten “made a strong plea” that Martin Harris’s “remains be left in Clarkston.” Ravsten’s pleading suggested he was willing to sustain whatever his Church superiors decided.

At the end of Bishop Ravsten’s remarks, Hovey remembered that the bishop “called for a standing vote.” Hovey recorded that “for the ayes, not one stood up. For the nays, it was like a rushing wind, all stood up, even those in the windows, every ‘chick and child.’ That settled the question,” Hovey wrote, “and our Committee left at once with our ‘ears pinned back’ in good shape.”

Outside the chapel, the stake presidencies, Hovey, and company found all the automobile tires flat. There was no “pumping station” in town. Keeping their sense of humor, the good-natured invaders “arrived late in Logan with two ‘all in’ with the pumping exercise.”³⁷ Given to warm-hearted hospitality, the Clarkston citizens are still somewhat embarrassed by the tire incident.³⁸ Still, the Clarkstonites were quite determined to keep Martin Harris and set armed guards to secure the Harris grave against any brave and adventurous types who might try to spirit it away to another location.³⁹ As it turned out, the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was moving forward with their plan to erect a church monument at the grave of Martin Harris as they had at other church history sites, a step which ended all such notions.

On July 10, 1925, on the 50th anniversary of Martin Harris’s death, the monument project of the First Presidency was completed. President Heber J. Grant was accompanied by his wife Augusta, and their daughters; also by Presiding Bishop and Mrs. Sylvester Q. Cannon, and Apostle and Assistant Church Historian A. William Lund. Nearly 1,000 enthusiastic people from all over Cache Valley attended the ceremony. The Benson Stake Presidency conducted the services. President Grant spoke and dedicated the Martin Harris monument. Russell Harris, son of Martin Harris, Jr., and oldest living grandson of Martin Harris, unveiled the monument.

Placed in the base of the monument was a solid copper box containing “a Book of Mormon, a Doctrine and Covenants, and many testimonies of the people living at the

time who knew Martin Harris and who had heard his testimony.”⁴⁰ Clarkstonite John Godfrey, friend of Harris, who heard the Witness’s personal account, was invited to bear witness of Martin Harris’s testimony.⁴¹ Godfrey became a symbolic voice for all who heard Harris and assented to his request that his testimony never be forgotten. For them it became an historic way of restarting the oral tradition if it ever should be neglected and lost in the future.

That the Book of Mormon was buried inside a stone box for preservation was at the very heart of the spirit and symbolism of Latter-day Saint festival designed to preserve, save, and improve civilization. Martin Harris had helped finance the publication of both books sealed in the box. Together the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants joined the lives of the ancient saints with those of the nineteenth and twentieth century Latter-day Saints. Such ceremonies enacted by the most senior LDS Church leader and his associates acted to stimulate the oral transmission of LDS knowledge to the membership long after the passing of a generation.

MARTIN HARRIS, THE MAN WHO BECAME A FESTIVAL

In the 71 years between 1925 and 1996, many LDS Church and family groups visited the Martin Harris grave every year. Encouraged by local and general church leaders, the Martin Harris grave site evolved into a place for Aaronic Priesthood young men and young women to visit with adult church advisors. Uncounted thousands of youth and parents heard the testimony of Martin Harris from persons like Willie Pilkington, John Godfrey, William Homer, and Annie Jardine.

The voices of those who heard Harris touched future leaders in the Church. LDS Apostle John A. Widtsoe remembered hearing William Homer repeat Martin Harris’s testimony with convincing power. Widtsoe wrote of it in the Improvement Era, an official church publication.⁴² Mormon Tabernacle Choir Director Evan Stephens, defender of the faith and promoter of fine arts in Utah, celebrated his Willard and Cache Valley recollections by composing a “Memorial Hymn” to the memory of Martin Harris.⁴³

In the fall of 1981, L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of the Twelve (also from Cache Valley) told Clarkston Mayor Denzel Clark of having heard Willie Pilkington as a boy on an Aaronic Priesthood outing.⁴⁴ Thousands of such events

have been recounted not only as regards Utahans William Pilkington, John Godfrey, and Annie Jardine, but Arizona’s William Gale as well.⁴⁵

Persons who had heard Harris did not consider their knowledge elitist. To assume such would have constituted a great impropriety in the LDS community. Those who had not heard Martin Harris personally were often just as vigorous in maintaining the tradition as those who had, as seen in the case of William Gale.

In the April General Conference of the LDS Church in 1992, Thomas S. Monson, Second Counselor to President Ezra Taft Benson, spoke of traveling to Clarkston and to Martin Harris’s grave for an Aaronic Priesthood Restoration Commemoration outing. A busload of young men from the stake “journeyed ninety miles to the Clarkston Cemetery, where we viewed the grave of Martin Harris.” “Elder Glen L. Rudd, then a high councilor [later a general church Seventy],” President Monson recalled, “presented the background of the life of Martin Harris, read from the Book of Mormon his testimony, and then bore his own witness to the truth. The young men listened with rapt attention, touched the granite marker, and pondered the words they had heard and the feelings they had felt.” They then traveled to the Logan Temple. “Heaven was very close that day,” President Monson remembered.⁴⁶ This scene, with variations, has been and continues to be repeated by hundreds if not thousands of LDS groups.

Visits to the Martin Harris grave increased between 1925 and 1934. The pilgrimage became one way of many to increase instruction about Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Clarkston Ward records for May 22, 1927, show an Aaronic Priesthood commemorative activity involving 992 people was scheduled to gather at the grave. Bad weather forced all inside the chapel. A few of those who had heard Martin Harris were present: John Godfrey, William H. Homer, and Russell Harris, as well as three grandsons and one great-grandson of Martin Harris.

In May 1934, evolving from and contributing to a growing tradition, a Church-wide Aaronic Priesthood Commemoration was held at the grave of Martin Harris. The Presiding Bishopric of the LDS Church sponsored the gathering. Presiding Bishop Sylvester Q. Cannon invited William Pilkington to tell the gathered thousands what he heard Martin Harris testify. Asked to speak for two minutes, Pilkington’s brevity and focused testimony had a

powerful effect.⁴⁷

Growing out of the 1934 Aaronic Priesthood commemoration was the plan by Clarkston's elected officials, supported by local LDS leaders, to construct an amphitheater on the south hillside of the cemetery to accommodate large crowds. The excavation began. Horses pulling scrapers made the first cuts into the hill, but the project was abandoned due to the Depression and a lack of funds.⁴⁸

On May 15, 1948, the 119th Commemoration of the Restoration of the Aaronic Priesthood was held at the Martin Harris grave site as a Church-wide priesthood meeting. Busloads of people gathered for the special occasion on the hot, sunny day. Nearly 2,300 attended. Church President and Prophet George Albert Smith presided and spoke. Standing in the back of a truck so he could be heard,⁴⁹ the LDS prophet commended all for keeping the sacred traditions alive, and bore witness of the divine origins of the LDS Church. The general effect of President Smith's decision to hold a church priesthood meeting at the Witness's grave prompted priesthood groups throughout the then predominantly Utah and Idaho Church to visit the Martin Harris grave and rehearse the details of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

THE AMPHITHEATER AND THE MARTIN HARRIS PAGEANT

Denzel Clark became the next major influence in passing stories of Martin Harris's knowledge of Latter-day Saint Christian origins. Denzel Clark's grandparents were children in Clarkston when Martin Harris lived there. Clark's parents lived in Clarkston all their married lives and witnessed the placement of the Martin Harris monument by President Grant in 1925. Most of the men in the Clark family participated in the 1934 and 1948 Church-wide priesthood celebrations and other local commemorations at the Harris grave.

Born on October 24, 1930, Denzel Clark grew up during the years of the Great Martin Harris Remembrance. Clark was nearly 18 years old during the 1948 meeting. Though out of town that day, Clark remembered being told by family members of President Smith's visit and the excitement in town.⁵⁰ The history of Martin Harris was told and retold in Denzel Clark's family during his years growing up at home. History telling "was an evening activity during the Depression years," Clark remembered.

As a boy, Denzel Clark and his friends sometimes played in the Clarkston Cemetery, and often visited the Harris grave.⁵¹ Clark heard John Godfrey's and Annie Jardine's accounts of having heard Martin Harris's personal testimony. Early in the spring of 1960, Denzel Clark and his wife Shirleen listened to the last living person who had heard Martin Harris: 90-year-old Charlie Harris, a great-nephew of Martin Harris, who had heard Martin Harris's testimony as a young boy in company with his mother.⁵²

While on the Clarkston Town Council in 1961, Denzel Clark learned about the abandoned Martin Harris amphitheater project of the mid-1930s from Golden Butters who was the mayor at the time. Clark began to consider the possibility of finishing the amphitheater project. Elected Clarkston's mayor in 1977, Clark served into 1986. In the spring of 1980, Mayor Clark gained the support of Governor Scott Matheson and encouragement of Elder L. Tom Perry, to build the Martin Harris Memorial Amphitheater. The groundbreaking took place on August 1, 1980, with Governor Matheson and Ezra Taft Benson, LDS President of the Quorum of the Twelve, as honored guests.

In 1982, Mayor Clark enlisted the aid of Valdo Benson, a Regional Representative of the LDS Apostles, to find persons to write and produce a community pageant in the amphitheater. In April 1982, Duane Huff of Logan, Utah, agreed to serve as director. I accepted the assignment to be playwright and to write a new history of Martin Harris.

In the same year, documents collector Mark Hofmann circulated a fake October 23, 1830 letter in which Martin Harris purportedly told William W. Phelps that a mystical white salamander turned into the Book of Mormon's angel Moroni during the acquisition of the sacred golden plates from which the Book of Mormon was later translated. Hofmann's bogus letter attributed Latter-day Saint origins to folk magic, feeding false information to historians, journalists, and religionists. On November 29, 1982, Hofmann put his fraudulent letter in the rumor mill using Michael Marquardt; and by December 16, Lyn Jacobs, fronting for Hofmann, tried to sell the letter to LDS Church officials.⁵³

Working with the Martin Harris family and the LDS Church Historian's Office, I completed my research on Martin Harris in December 1982, and began writing the script for the Martin Harris Pageant. I decided to present LDS in the genre of a musical play. It was the first

presentation of Latter-day Saint founders singing and dancing in a representation of LDS history. By July 1983, music composed by Frank and Norma Dupree comprised songs arising out of dramatic moments, including underscoring for the play similar to that used to underscore a motion picture. Mike Cottle also composed songs. I wrote all the lyrics.

In the summer of 1983 (working independently of the Martin Harris Pageant Committee), relatives of Martin Harris, Madge Harris Tuckett and Belle Harris Wilson, published The Martin Harris Story. My multigenre work, The Man Who Knew: The Early Years--A Play about Martin Harris, 1824-1830 (with historical annotations), came off the press in August in time to distribute gift copies to persons attending the Mormon Historical Association meetings at Brigham Young University. The buzz about the Hofmann "find" of the "White Salamander Letter" caused most to ignore my research, which reaffirmed the claims of traditional histories. Most historians and journalists believed Hofmann's fake letter was authentic. Distractors and critics of the orthodox LDS view of church history believed Hofmann's letter provided the sought-after alternative explanation to Latter-day Saint beginnings. Some LDS believers who were members of the academic community saw Hofmann's fake letter as discrediting Martin Harris as a credible witness of their church's origins. A few accepted magic as the origin of the LDS faith.⁵⁴

On a very hot August 6, 1983, Mayor Denzel Clark conducted the dedication of the Martin Harris Memorial Amphitheater. Governor Matheson of Utah, Governor John Evans of Idaho, and LDS President of the Twelve Ezra T. Benson spoke to the thousand capacity crowd who attended. President Benson offered the dedicatory prayer, promising success and the enlightenment ten of thousands about the true origins of Latter-day Saint Christianity.⁵⁵

Saturday, August 27, the recently organized Martin Harris Family Organization headed by Leonard Harris of Springville, Utah, gathered at the Martin Harris Memorial Amphitheater. Numbering over 300, the Harrises witnessed the first performance of the historical musical play "Martin Harris, the Man Who Knew." The Utah State University Orchestra directed by Music Department Head, Professor Warren Burton, performed the musical score. Valdo Benson, with permission of the Martin Harris Family Organization, shared with the pageant leadership a blessing given Martin Harris by Joseph Smith, Sr. in Kirtland, Ohio, on August 27, 1835, exactly 148 years to the day the

production played to Martin Harris's descendants. In part it read: "Thy mind shall be enlarged, and thy testimony shall yet convince its thousands, and its tens of thousands; yea, it shall shine like the Sun, and though the wicked seek to overthrow it, it shall be in vain, for the Lord God shall bear it off victorious. Thou shalt have a tongue and wisdom that all the enemies of truth cannot withstand nor gainsay."

On Monday, August 29, families of cast members watched the performance. The first public performance played on Tuesday, August 30. Four more followed to Saturday, September 3, when more than 300 members of the Ezra Taft Benson family and relatives attended. The week was filled with dark clouds, rain, and lightning, which stopped long enough for the performances. A downpour "baptized" the audience after the performance on Friday, September 2. More than 27,000 attended during the seven performances.

In 1984, about 35,000 attended the Martin Harris Pageant in seven days. In 1985, the attendance at the Martin Harris Pageant filled every seat. In 1986, forensic experts George Throckmorton and William Flynn convinced the skeptics and revisionists that Hofmann's Harris letter was a fraud. Forger Mark Hofmann pled guilty on January 23, 1987.⁵⁶

1986 through 1995 were banner years for the Martin Harris Pageant. People from 23 states and a dozen foreign countries witnessed the festival. In 1986, in the spirit of rural hospitality, the Clarkston people began serving a meal to visiting pageant guests. In 1990, one of the United States' finest oil painters, Bill L. Hill, was invited by the pageant leadership to show his personal collection named "The Witness Series" and lectured on the "witness tradition" in LDS Church history. The same year, my lectures given before the historical drama, were moved from the Martin Harris grave site into the amphitheater at the suggestion of Elder Joseph Wirthlin, an LDS apostle. Every year the Martin Harris Memorial Amphitheater facilities underwent improvements and additions. A large cast and prop storage building was completed in 1995 and dedicated in 1996.⁵⁷

From 1992 through 1995, tickets for pageant seating were "sold out" seven months before the traditional August performances. By the 1995 pageant, the Clarkston people had welcomed more than 300,000 guests to their usual cemetery setting for outdoor theater commemorating Martin Harris's witness and the coming forth of the Book of

Mormon. Sixty thousand ticket orders were made that could not be filled. In 1996, the LDS Church Missionary Committee added three additional performances nights to the Martin Harris Pageant totalling ten performances. Nineteen thousand tickets were ordered between February 1 and 3, 1996. An additional 8,000 tickets for special guests were gone by April. The same year, the Martin Harris burial site underwent improvements and a new trimonolith white marble monument recounting Martin Harris's life was planned for the entrance of the Clarkston cemetery, replacing a large wooden monument.⁵⁸

Could Martin Harris ever have imagined that when he asked the people of Smithfield and Clarkston, Utah, to pass on his knowledge about God, Joseph Smith, and the Book of Mormon to later generations that such events would occur as they did after his death? It was likely Martin Harris believed the promise by Joseph Smith, Sr.: “. . . thy testimony shall yet convince its thousands, and its tens of thousands; yea, it shall shine like the Sun. . . .”

NOTES

1. Official Report of the One Hundred Fifty-seventh Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, October 3 and 4, 1987, 84-88.
2. Ibid.
3. Official Report of the One Hundred Sixty-second Semiannual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, March 31 and April 1, 1990, 23.
4. Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the LDS Church, Period I, 48-49.
5. Doctrine and Covenants 17.
6. William Pilkington letter dated November 12, 1927, original in the possession of Adrian Gale of Logan, Utah. Photographed copies owned by Rhett S. James and the Martin Harris Pageant, Logan, Utah.
7. The Testimony of the Three Witnesses in the Book of Mormon.
8. Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the Church, Period I, Vol. I, 54-55.
9. Book of Mormon, Alma 41: Doctrine and Covenants, Section 76.
10. Ben J. And Eunice P. Ravsten, History of Clarkston: The Granary of Cache Valley 1864-1964 (Logan, Utah: Ben and Eunice Ravsten, 1966) 164, 476.
11. Ravsten and Ravsten, 14, 176.
12. Ravsten and Ravsten 334, 340.
13. Scott R. Shelton, “Martin Harris in Cache Valley--Events and Influence” (Logan, Utah: Utah State University, MS Thesis, 1986), 61-62.
14. May 6, 1995, for example, Rhett James and his son Stephen found a potted flower at Harris's grave as they arrived unannounced about 10 a.m. on a rainy morning. They visited the Martin Harris grave site in order to begin drawing up plans for a renovation in 1996.
15. Shelton, 72-73.
16. Ibid.
17. LDS Church Journal History, March 15, 1906.
18. Deseret News, June 10, 1922.
19. LDS Journal History, July 31, 1913. See also Shelton, 73.
20. William Pilkington, “Autobiography,” 22, represents one of many such requests by Martin Harris.
21. Rhett James, Martin Harris: The Man Who Knew, 5, 95-99, and W. Adrian Gale family records (Providence, Utah).
22. President Heber J. Grant to William Pilkington, August 13, 1935, in Pilkington 30-32.
23. Pilkington 30-32.
24. Pilkington, Autobiography 23; Gunnell 76-77 refers to page 17 in Pilkington, which may be an error.
25. Pilkington 70.
26. William Pilkington married Margaret Alice

Farrell on October 4, 1883. The couple had nine children. The Pilkingtons owned property and homes in both Smithfield and Logan, Utah.

27. Mrs. L. J. Merrill's letter to Miss Alice Merrill was sent to Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The envelope was postmarked November 12, 1927. (There is some question about whether or not the first initial is "L".) When rediscovered in the family home of W. Adrian Gale in Providence, Cache Valley, Utah on April 6, 1996, the envelope contained only a letter by William Pilkinton dated April 10, 1926. The paper of the envelope and the two page letter by William Pilkington appeared to be the same stationery. The provenance of the letter seems to be William Pilkington, Mrs. L. J. Merrill, Alice Merrill, William Gale, W. Adrian Gale.

Why the letter was composed on April 10 and not sent until November 12 is not presently known. Perhaps William Pilkington's letter was written for Mrs. L. J. Merrill, who afterwards decided to send it to Miss Alice Merrill for whatever reason; or Mrs. Merrill may have asked William Pilkington for the letter to send to Alice, but just didn't get around to sending the letter until eight months later. Another possibility is that the April 10, 1927 Pilkington letter does not go with the November 12, 19027 envelope, but later found its way inside the envelope; however, the paper of the letter and envelope seems to be the same, and there is no other letter in the envelope.

How William Gale came by the letter is not known. W. Adrian Gale assumes his father came by the letter while on his mission. In 1932-33, the Northwestern States Mission included Oregon, Washington, Canadian Provinces of British Columbia, part of Alberta, and Alaska. The envelope was addressed to Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Did Alice Merrill migrate to or travel into Alberta or British Columbia? Perhaps Alice Merrill sent the Pilkington letter to a friend or family member in the western provinces? Who gave it to William Gale is not known. Research on the whereabouts of all concerned between 1927 and 1933 must yet be done.

The style of writing matches known William Pilkington writing. The William Pilkington letter has apparently been in the possession of either William Gale or W. Adrian Gale since at least 1933. William Gale married Ruth Thygeron on September 17, 1930. One year later William Gale was called to serve in the Northwestern States Mission. W. Adrian Gale was born in 1935, and from his earliest memories recalls his father giving lectures about the Book of Mormon.

28. W. Adrian Gale telephone call to Rhett S. James, April 10, 1996. See also W. Adrian Gale, "Gale/Pilkington Letter," Providence, Utah, April 18, 1996, 1-5.

29. Gale, 1-5.

30. Merlin R. Hovey, "An Attempt to Move the Remains of Martin Harris from the Clarkston Cemetery to Logan" (Manuscript, March 7, 1955) cited in Wayne C. Gunnell, "Martin Harris--Witness and Benefactor to the Book of Mormon" (MS thesis, Brigham Young University, June 1955) 77-80, and Shelton 75-77.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Hovey cited by Shelton 76.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Hovey cited by Gunnell 79.

38. Shelton 87, Note 21.

39. Denzel Clark letter to Rhett James, March 6, 1995; also see James, 95-96, and Shelton, 78-79.

40. Ravsten and Ravsten, 32; also Shelton 80.

41. Martin Harris file, LDS Church Historical Library, Salt Lake City, Utah; also Gunnell 80-81 and Shelton 79-80.

42. Improvement Era 29:468-472.

43. Hymn duplicated in Gunnell 86.

44. Denzel Clark interviewed by Rhett S. James, May 5, 1995; also told January 12, 1983 in Martin Harris Pageant Committee meeting.

45. Rhett S. James Collection, 1983-1996, "Accounts of Persons Hearing the Testimony of Martin Harris from Persons Other Than Martin Harris."

46. Official Report of the One Hundred Sixty-second Annual General Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints held in the Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, 69-70.

47. Pilkington 25.

48. Denzel Clark letter to Rhett James, received March 6, 1995, 3.

49. Denzel Clark telephone interview by Rhett James, May 9, 1995.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Clark March 6, 1995 letter, 3.

52. Denzel Clark interviewed by Rhett James, May 10, 1995.

53. Ken Godfrey, "The Mark Hofmann Case; A Basic Chronology" (no date) distributed to Logan LDS Institute teachers sometime after February 16, 1989.

54. LDS Dean Jessee's The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith appeared in February 1983 before the forgeries were discovered and this included six Hofmann forgeries. In March 1983, Jerald and Sandra Tanner's Utah Lighthouse Ministry admitted to "some reservations" about the White Salamander Letter because of similarities to an affidavit of Willard Chase to E. D. Howe's Mormonism Unveiled [sic] (1834). Sandra Tanner joked to visitors at ULM bookstore: "Jerald thinks it may be a fake. I think it is authentic. We will win either way it goes." On August 25, 1983, the Los Angeles Times published a long article on the Salamander Letter. Newspapers across the United States picked up the story. On September 26, Mark Hofmann learned from Kenneth Rendell that William G. Krueger found no indications of forgery in the 1830 Salamander Letter attributed to Martin Harris. On March 20, 1984, Kenneth Rendell sent his report to Steve Christensen that, "There is no indication that this letter [the 1830 Martin Harris White Salamander Letter] is a forgery."

By February 1984, my entomological, syntactical, and textual studies on the White Salamander Letter had begun. March 6, 1984, I wrote LDS Church Historian G. Homer Durham, suggesting that possible metaphorical meanings of "salamander" as a way to examine the White Salamander Letter. On August 22, 1984, The Cache Citizen (Logan, Utah) published a twelve page news magazine on the

Martin Harris Pageant and my research, which affirmed traditional accounts of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. By September 1984, I was well into my syntax and textual studies of the White Salamander Letter, concluding on October 3, 1984, that the October 23, 1830 Martin Harris letter was a fraud. Earlier, on September 9, 1984, the LDS Church News published my earlier writings on March 1984 with findings about salamanders as references to angels, brave soldiers and such as found in French, Italian, German, Greek and Egyptian writings. Between September and April, I shared my findings that the White Salamander Letter was a fraud with Steve F. Christensen, the LDS Church Historian's Office, and other LDS officials.

April 28, 1985, the Church News published a First Presidency statement acknowledging that while forensic examiners had found "no indication" that the 1830 Harris letter was "forgery," the possibility that Martin Harris did not write the letter remained. On April 30, I issued a public news release announcing my conclusions that the 1830 letter was a fraud.

Most did not accept my conclusions. Even after George Throckmorton and William Flynn's forensic evidence that the White Salamander Letter was a fraud, a series of books were published casting shadows on the Latter-day Saint origins: I.e., Jerald Tanner, Tracking the White Salamander: The Story of Mark Hofmann, Murder and Forged Mormon Documents (October 28, 1986), D. Michael Quinn, Early Mormonism and the Magic World View (August 1987), Sillitoe and Roberts, Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders, with a Forensic Analysis by George J. Throckmorton (April 1988), Naifeh and Smith, The Mormon Murders: A True Story of Greed, Forgery, and Death (August 1988), and Robert Lindsey, A Gathering of Saints: A True Story of Murder and Deceit (September 1987).

55. Rhett S. James journal notes.

56. In an illogical smoke screen, various persons from among Mark Hofmann's former intellectual allies rushed to point public criticism away from themselves and at the the LDS Church, publishing books and articles, arguing weakly that their folk magic thesis still held. Pageant members remembered the 1835 prophecy by Joseph Smith's father to Martin Harris: "and though the wicked seek to overthrow it [Harris's testimony], it shall be in vain, for the Lord God shall bear it off victorious." In 1992, Richard Turley's Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case showed that the LDS Church and its

representatives were innocent victims of Hofmann's conspiracy to supply his New History allies with ammunition that could be used to rewrite Latter-day Saint Christian origins.

57. At the instruction of LDS Utah North Area President Alexander Morrison, newly called LDS Area Authority Jess L. Christensen offered the dedicatory prayer on Sunday October, 1995 at 3 p.m. Martin Harris Presidency members, staff, and a few cast members attended on the cold, rainy day. Denzel Clark recorded that the Benson State Presidency and High Council, the Clarkston Bishopric, LDS Auxiliary leaders, Clarkston Mayer and City Council, cast and friends attended. (Denzel Clark Letter Books, October 22, 1995; also Jess Christensen Date Book for 1995.)

58. Denzel Clark Journal, Clarkston, Utah; Rhett S. James Letter Files, 1995-1996.