Life at a Church Academy: The Murdock LDS Academy in Beaver, Utah

Casey Paul Griffiths

Nestled at the base of the Tushar Mountains is the small Southern Utah community of Beaver. Because it is located next to an Interstate highway, visitors quickly passing by might notice an eclectic collection of older looking homes, geological formations, or community identifiers like the large "B" which graces the side of the most prominent mountain near the town. As with many small American towns in years past, the life of the community often revolved around the local high school. Yet many of the older citizens in Beaver sometimes refer to another school, the Murdock Academy, which flourished in the town nearly a century earlier. They speak of the school in more revered tones than the local high school, since it wasn't *just* a high school, but an LDS academy, a Church-sponsored institution of learning that straddled the border between secondary education and college-level academics. With proud affection local residents remember a time when Beaver wasn't just another rest stop along the I-15 corridor, but a center of learning for all of the communities in the surrounding counties. They also recall fondly a time when the academy wasn't just the center of a single community, but a beacon that drew the finest youth from all over the southern portion of the state. The fog of seventy years' distance makes the memories vague, but the spirit of the academy still lingers in the community.

Casey Paul Griffiths (griffithscp@ldschurch.org) is an instructional designer for the LDS Seminaries and Institutes and an adjunct professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University. He holds a PhD in Educational Leadership from BYU. The focus of his research is twentieth century Latter-day Saint history, with an emphasis on education and global expansion. His previous publications have appeared in *BYU Studies*, *Journal of Mormon History*, *Religious Educator*, and several published volumes on LDS history and doctrine. He is currently working on a biography of LDS Apostle Joseph F. Merrill and a book focusing on the history of Mormon education.

The LDS academy in Beaver was one of many scattered throughout the Intermountain West. With the exception of the academy in Colonia Juarez, Mexico, all have long ceased operations or have been turned over to state control. However, at one time the academies formed the backbone of the educational system of the LDS Church. While a few academies survived to become institutions, like Brigham Young University, Ricks College (and now BYU-Idaho), Snow College, and Dixie College, most faded into oblivion in the early twentieth century. With the memories of the academies drifting further into memory, we are led to explore the establishment of the school and its history, the lifestyle of its students, and its place in Latter-day Saint culture.

The LDS Church Academy System

The Latter-day Saint academy movement took place roughly from the late 1880s to the early 1930s. In American educational history, academies reached their peak during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in the northeastern United States.[1] Given the origins of the Latter-day Saint movement in those areas, it is not difficult to establish a connection from these eastern academies to their descendants in the Mormon-settled West. Schools were a vital part of the Latter-day Saint experience from the beginning. Even the first LDS temple in Kirtland, Ohio, was used more as a school than a spiritual center, though it is difficult to draw a distinction between those two functions in Latter-day Saint thought. Later, as Latter-day Saints colonized the Intermountain West, schools were seen as a vital part of each community. In education, as in government generally, it was sometimes difficult to see where the line ended between Church and state in Mormon country. Stake academies flourished and grew haphazardly throughout the region, though it was only in the late 1880s that the LDS network of schools was systematized by Church president Wilford Woodruff.

Fearing the encroachment of public secular schools, Woodruff launched an initiative to provide an LDS alternative to the burgeoning public school system. Forming the first Church board of education in 1888, the First Presidency wrote to local leaders, saying:

> We feel that the time has arrived when the proper education of our children should be taken in hand by us as a people. Religious training is practically excluded from the District Schools. The perusal of books that we value as divine records is forbidden. Our children, if left to the training they receive in these schools, will grow up entirely ignorant of those principles of salvation for which the Latter-day Saints have made so many sacrifices. To permit this condition of things to exist among us would be criminal.[2]

Moving quickly to follow Woodruff's directive, local stakes began to form their own boards of education. By 1889, all but two of the twenty-nine stakes had complied.[3] Most LDS histories list twenty-two academies being more or less established during this period.[4] The academies were mostly found in the Mormon culture regions of Utah, Idaho, and Arizona, but could also be found in locations as far flung as Big Horn, Montana; Cardston, Canada; or Colonia Juarez, Mexico.[5] The economic turmoil of the 1890s doomed most of these early schools, but by the end of the decade better times helped the remaining academies survive and new ones to take hold.

The Beaver Branch Academy

The story of the LDS academy in Beaver is unique. One consistent factor in the area's educational history during this era is the work of Reinhard Maeser, the eldest son of the famed LDS educator Karl G. Maeser. The younger Maeser's service in Beaver came as a result of an educational tour in which he accompanied his father through the settlements of Southern Utah. Reinhard would later recall:

> My father and James E. Talmage were about to make a trip through Southern Utah as far as St. George, in the interest of education, and I was invited to go along. While visiting Beaver, the trustees consulted my father respecting a teacher for their school. The three or four districts had been consolidated, [and] would make this a large and important one. I was asked if I would accept the position, which I did. After returning from St. George in the latter part of July, 1881, I remained in Beaver to arrange for the opening of school in the latter part of August.[6]

Reinhard Maeser, son of Karl G. Maeser, and a key figure in the history of the Murdock Academy, date unknown. Maeser taught taught English and later served as the principal of the school during its final years. Photo courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah

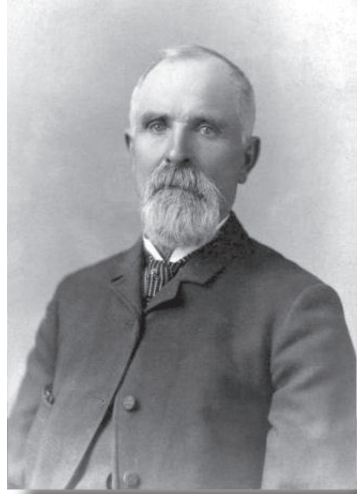
View of several of the original structures of Fort Cameron, near Beaver, Utah. Built in the wake of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, LDS President John Taylor later stated the fort would serve as the unlikely location of a school. Photo courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Maeser would remain in Beaver for the next thirty-nine years, becoming a fixture of the intellectual, cultural, and educational life of the town. He participated in early attempts to begin a school in Beaver, and later was a key participant in launching the academy after President Woodruff issued his directive in 1888.

Education in Beaver roughly paralleled the ups and downs of the larger Latter-day Saint movement. By 1886, Maeser had persuaded Church leaders to set up the Beaver Stake Academy, the first Church school south of Provo. It functioned for only four years, until the Utah State legislature passed a bill establishing a free school system in Utah. With free schools in place, the academy was thought to be impractical, and the school closed in 1890, giving way for the public schools.

But the citizens of Beaver were not yet ready to give up on the notion of a Church school in their community. Beaver had one asset which they felt might give the town an advantage in building a Church school—the nearby abandoned Fort Cameron. Built in 1872, the fort stood at the mouth of Beaver Canyon, about a mile away from the main town. Established partially to protect settlers against Indian raids, and partially to project federal power to the nearby Mormon settlements, the fort long stood as a symbol of government intrusion into the life of the local people. The fort's most famous

distinction was that it had briefly held John D. Lee, leader of the infamous Mountain Meadows massacre.[7] When the fort was abandoned in 1883, the townspeople of Beaver began looking for a good way to put the complex of buildings to good use. According to local lore, Church president John Taylor had even prophesied during a visit to Beaver that "Fort Cameron should be turned into a school for the education of the youth of Zion."[8] When the coming of the railroad made the fort unnecessary in 1882, it was abandoned. Shortly after, John R. Murdock, president of the Beaver Stake, and Philo T. Farnsworth purchased the land and the buildings for $15,000—a bargain at one-eighth of the post's original cost.[9]



John R. Murdock, date unknown.

With a ready-made campus in place, the stage was set to bring a Church school to the community. The economic ups and downs of the early 1890s prevented the school from making a successful start, but by 1898 the time was right. To ensure its success, a bargain was struck between the Beaver Stake and the Brigham Young Academy in Provo. The school at Fort Cameron would be established as a branch of the B.Y.A., with Church funds providing partial support.[10] In return, Murdock and Farnsworth would donate the land, and the people of Beaver would provide $1,200 annually. If the school was still successful after ten years, it would be allowed to become an independent unit.[11]

With financial backing for the academy secure, the local citizens volunteered to re-shingle and fit up the buildings for educational purposes, and the buildings were quickly converted into a campus.[12] The hospital was used as an office and classroom building; the four barracks were converted into apartments, a gymnasium, and an assembly hall; the officers' quarters housed both faculty and students, and the old commissary was made into a bookstore.[13] The central square which the buildings surrounded, once used to drill troops, became the main athletic field.[14] Reinhard Maeser acted as an agent in arranging for the furnishings in student and faculty housing.[15] Officially, the academy was presided over by Benjamin Cluff Jr., the head of parent school, the Brigham Young Academy, in Provo, and named the Murdock Academy after John Riggs Murdock.[16] Ernest DeAlton Partridge, grandson of Edward Partridge, the first bishop of the Church, was chosen as

Several buildings at Fort Cameron which later served as dormitories for students who boarded at Murdock Academy. Photograph courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

the first principal. Four other teachers—Reinhard Maeser, Edward P. Kimball, Freda Barnum, and Mary J. Ollerton—joined Partridge as faculty members.[17] Enrollment began slowly and then picked up. In mid-October 1898, Partridge reported to Cluff that fifty-four students had enrolled, with many more seeking admission. By mid-November, the student body had climbed to a robust 102.[18] The academy was up and running.

Student Life at the Academy

Conditions at the Beaver Academy were crude, especially in its early days. Water was carried from the nearby Beaver River to the campus. Since there was no electricity, the only light came from kerosene lamps. Six years after school opened, the first electric lights were installed and water was piped to two hydrants on each side of the campus. At the same time, the first telephone was installed.[19]

While some of the students commuted from nearby Beaver, the majority came from outlying communities and boarded at the school. The cost of renting a room when the academy opened was between seventy-five cents and two dollars per month. Houses of six rooms could be rented for the bargain

price of six dollars per month. Board was $2.00–$2.50 a week, but students also had the option of providing for themselves, which reduced the cost. The academy circular cheerily described the student housing as containing "large, well-ventilated rooms." In the cold climate of Beaver this meant that the housing could become extremely cold, so students were allowed to purchase wood from the academy and were exhorted to gather their own fuel from the nearby hills during their free time.[20]

Living arrangements literally brought students and teachers together. All the housing was arranged around the central square of the campus. Each of the two story houses on the campus had six rooms on the ground floor, and four large rooms upstairs. The students lived upstairs, two per room, with enough space for "clothing, a double bed, table, cook stove, and several chairs." [21] One student recalled that "the one modern feature was an electric light bulb in each room and hallway."[22] The ground floor apartments had three rooms each and were used mostly to house teachers and their families.[23] Close quarters between faculty and students was a necessity, since most of the students came from far away and lived without parents. E. E. Ericksen, the school's principal from 1912–1915, described the arrival of new students. "Parents would bring their boys and girls with three or four months' provisions and a few pieces of furniture, secure living quarters, and leave all other matters for us to look after. Sometimes a mother would come and live with her children, but most students were without adult supervision other than that provided by the school."[24]

Since most of the students were without parental supervision, a new kind of family was created at the academy. Ericksen recalled how discouraged many of the new arrivals were: "The students were often timid at first, and when they saw where and how they were to live, they frequently felt discouraged. We assured them that they were among friends who had experiences similar to their own and that they would soon feel comfortable and happy."[25] Faculty members were assigned to personally look after student needs and morals. The environment lent itself to closeness in the community. Though few students spoke warmly of the accommodations, most remembered the faculty with fondness. One student described the school as "poorly equipped for buildings but for me, at least, it had the best teachers in the state . . . I never saw better teachers."[26]

The principal and faculty maintained a close watch on the students. In the early days, teachers would visit students in their boarding houses twice a week or more. Committees, consisting of three young men or women, were appointed to attend to ill students.[27] If any lamps were seen burning after ten p.m. the principal would soon be rapping on the door to find out the reason.[28] Such domestic closeness lent itself to some of the awkwardness,

which comes naturally whenever large groups of people live closely together. Abigail Prestwich, a 1914 student who lived at the academy with her mother and sister, Fern, recalled the following experience: "Principal Ericksen and his wife came to visit Mother. Unknown to me, Fern had decided to use the pot instead of making the long trip to the 'out house.' I invited the Principal and his wife in. There was Fern perched on the pot. She quickly spread her skirts out around the pot and her. They visited for over a half hour. Boy, did I get my ears boxed when they left, with an explanation that she would have a lifetime ring around her bottom."[29]

In the early days, the student population was small and funding was difficult to come by, but it only served to draw the community closer together. Reinhard Maeser recalled: "Our finances, too, were largely of a minus quality in those days. It is true we had our banquets, though sometimes they may have consisted of ginger-bread, pop-corn, and dried apples; but what we lacked in variety, we made up in good cheer and gratitude."[30] Things improved, however, and within a few years the school faced a new challenge—growth.

Living accommodations were a frequent worry in the minds of the school principals, who mentioned them often in their correspondence. As the school's population continued to grow, it became more of a concern. Josiah Hickman, principal from 1907–1911, frequently complained that the facilities could not match the need. In 1908 he wrote to President Brimhall of BYU: "We have at present between 325 and 330 students in our school and others preparing to come. . . . Every nook and corner of our school is crowded to the bursting point. Even the reading room, faculty room, and office are used for holding classes."[31] A week later in a tone of exasperation he wrote: "I do not know of a better work that the church school superintendent could be engaged in than to give us his undivided attention for one, two, three, or four weeks, until this school is put in a condition that it would not be black-eye to our church school system. In the language of one of our apostles, 'he would not allow one of his children to attend a school with such dilapidated buildings.'"[32]

More than a decade into its life, there was still no building on the campus built exclusively for education. The students and the local citizens were heartened when Francis M. Lyman, a member of the Twelve, visited and prophesied that one day Murdock Academy would become the great institution of higher learning in Southern Utah.[33] After the school became independent in 1908, plans were immediately laid to construct a new building on the campus. Work began in earnest but quickly ground to a halt. Funding from the local stakes had dried up as the cost of the building escalated. The school's newspaper, the *Murdock Lever*, called on the citizens of Beaver to donate, borrow, and do whatever was necessary to raise the funds needed. An editorial in the paper attempted to goad the population to pick up the work

The new home of the Murdock Academy shortly after the time of its completion, circa 1912. Photograph courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

again: “Why has the work ceased? Why is that heap of uncut and unplaced stone allowed to lie like sepulchral monuments to a dead issue while students’ feet are frosted in classrooms for want of comforts that cannot be provided in the present building? . . . Is this delay in construction necessary?”[34]

Despite such ardent student pleas, the project languished for several years before it could be completed. Still the students and faculty maintained a healthy outlook on the adversities they faced. When one of the older buildings burned down in 1913, Principal Ericksen noted somewhat puckishly that “some may have thought this was my personal contribution to the cause [of the new building] but I swear I did not do it. Yet all the students, faculty and even the principal seemed to enjoy the big fire. More than that, they whispered, ‘We may now get the new building completed.’”[35]

Shortly after the fire, Elder Lyman visited the school. Reminded of his prophecy and seeing the sad state of the campus, he asked, “Would you like me to fulfill my prediction?”[36] With his urging, and at a cost of more than $100,000 the Church paid to finish the building. Though the final structure did not fit the original plans for a three-story building with a grand tower on top, a beautiful, two-story building was finished and remained the heart of the school for the rest of its life.[37]

The Murdock Academy band in 1912. Performing arts were a popular pastime at the academy. Photograph courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

A female physical education class in front of the new academy building, circa 1912. Photo courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Classes and Curriculum

The course offering for the school varied throughout its history. When the school originally opened, only a two-year high school course was held, but the academy's offerings rapidly expanded. By the time it became an independent school in 1908 it had expanded to offer a high school course, an industrial course, and a normal (teacher training) course. The school's mission statement was "to promote man's complete development—physical intellectual, moral, and spiritual."[38]

An ambitious and wide-ranging list of subjects was offered. Course offerings ran the gamut, from elocution to woodworking to English to dressmaking.[39] The common thread connecting all the students was the theology courses. In accordance, every student was required to take religion courses, and nearly every teacher, regardless of his or her specialty, taught a religion class. Theology teachers were also asked to act as counselors for the students. BYU President George H. Brimhall wrote to Andrew Anderson, the school principal from 1900–1907: "I hope you will emphasize individual work with each student through his or her theology teacher. Every one of your theology teachers should know the inner life of every one of his or her students. They should therefore have a heart to heart talk with each one." Brimhall also advised Anderson to "have a private conversation with each of your teachers that you may know their inner life from individual contact."[40]

Some teachers took their duties to watch over the students more seriously than others. E. E. Ericksen recalled: "Some carried out their responsibilities with remarkable care, while others felt the obligations too heavy and burdensome. They would rather report the students' problems to the principal than become involved themselves. Others, however, would become too involved. At times someone would report a disconcerting quietness or observe that the lights were on at a very late hour. At other times a dangerous darkness prevailed when the neighbors were sure that young people were still awake."[41]

The plan of study included a rigorous schedule. During the 1899–1900 school year the following daily regimen was laid out. At six a.m. students arose, ate breakfast, and studied until eight-thirty a.m. Classes ran until four p.m., with a lunch in between, then physical exercise until seven p.m., with dinner served during this period. At seven p.m. the students were expected to be in their rooms studying until ten p.m. and no later than eleven p.m., except on Friday and Sunday evenings.[42] With faculty and students adhering to the same study regimen and schedule, community was created through commonality of experience.

Rules and Regulations

One tradition at the academy that has been passed down to current Church schools was the code of conduct. Profanity and obscenity were strictly forbidden, as were the use of strong drink and tobacco. Students were not allowed to attend public parties and were advised to keep close to the campus. Other rules warned against "irregularity in habits, keeping late hours, having improper associates, and visiting places of questionable repute."[43] A student could even be called to the principal's office for "injudicious expenditure of means."[44] One student recalled the rules as "keep your room clean and orderly, visit only briefly, attend the Church meetings, keep the Word of Wisdom, and study in your own room."[45] Benjamin Cluff, principal of the parent academy, warned Reinhard Maeser at the academy's beginning that "it would be necessary for you to exercise a constant watchfulness over the school and to see that no spirit of hilarity" developed.[46]

Announcing the rules was one thing, *enforcing* the rules was quite another. Principal Ericksen remembered: "For me, visiting Church communities, lecturing on the importance of education, teaching psychology and education, presiding at church services, and conducting faculty meetings were easy compared to the duties of student discipline."[47] Enforcing the rules to a group of students far away from their parents appears to have been a daunting challenge. Early principal correspondence to the parent academy in Provo is filled with requests for advice on how to deal with unruly students. Problems ranged from a student who refused to pay rent,[48] to "filthy words" found in notebooks,[49] to charges of public drunkenness.[50]

The "boarding school" aspect of the academy may have made it popular for the taming of the wilder element of the communities of Southern Utah. Principal Ericksen complained that the academy functioned as a "reform school" for wayward boys.[51] Other principals were less harsh in their assessments. Andrew Anderson, the school's second principal, wrote: "We have some very wild students this year and it seems we are very slow in taming them. . . . I have never seen so many tobacco users before, of course it is used very quietly. . . . I am very anxious to reach them in a way that will create a reform rather than have them stop on account of fear."[52] Josiah Hickman, the next principal, noted cheerfully: "We have just enough black sheep in their midst to keep us busy in lifting up the morality of the school."[53]

The coed environment caused worry among the faculty as well. Principal Anderson wrote to President Cluff on the dangers of such an environment without parental supervision. "The evil which might be committed between the young man and young lady will be the greatest evil to contend with in relation to our school."[54] Principal Ericksen also remembered: "I was told

that one of my predecessors had made surprise visits to student quarters at night. He had also delivered lectures on chastity."[55] In each housing unit, a senior student was appointed by faculty to ensure that "proper deportment" was found among the student dwellings.[56]

If the existing correspondence is any indication, the first principal, Ernest D. Partridge, faced a Herculean task of establishing the school and its moral standards. Appointed in 1898, two years later he wrote to President Brimhall in Provo: "It seems that my system is so run down that I can't stand the strain of responsibility."[57] One academy history described Partridge as "almost worn out" when he left to return to the academy in Provo.[58] His letters take on almost comic tone as he tries to report on school functions while describing some of the more unpleasant aspects of his disciplinary duties: "We held the party as announced, and that night there were about a dozen of the students all the way from 'feeling good' to 'dead drunk.' What made it worse, there were some of the best students mixed up in it."[59]

When Partridge finally did expel some of the more unruly students, he faced repercussions. Another of his letters notes:

> We had our regular ball last night. It was successful. There was a plot arranged in town yesterday among the toughs and the suspended students to come out and ride me around the campus on a rail. It became so public that the marshal came up to notify me and to see that all was well. The fellows were there but I did not get my ride. I refused admittance to them and publicly asked all who had been drinking and smoking to leave and two more left.[60]

A week later, Partridge noted that on a trip into Beaver "the mayor and a force of police were out to catch the Hoodlums if they attempted to do anything with our buggy."[61]

As the academy grew more established, discipline problems seem to have lessened. The school community grew closer, and one student noted that "the seclusion of the school was a benefit to the morals and religious conduct of the students."[62] By the academy's fifth year the problem had lessened to some mixed reports of smoking and drinking, alongside a report of "a large dictionary ruined by placing stickers through the printed pages."[63] It should not be assumed from these few reports that the academy was den of iniquity. For the most part, the students seem to have been well-behaved. But the incidents reported found in these letters do serve to remind us that students will be students, no matter the school or the era.

Sports, Performances, and Celebrations

As with most schools, academics provided the frame of the community, but the heart could be found in student activities. One of the most attrac-

Alma Richards, 1912 gold medal Olympian, attended Murdock Academy. Photograph courtesy Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

tive aspects of the school was its lush green drilling grounds, which were the host to many athletic events. The sport mentioned most in association with Murdock Academy was track. Murdock even succeeded in producing one world class athlete, Alma Richards, the first Utahan to win a gold medal in the Olympic Games.[64] Richards' achievements enabled the citizens of Southern Utah to show a certain amount of superiority over their big-city counterparts to the north. The local Beaver paper described Richards' victory in the state meet: "The Murdock Academy in particular and Southern Utah in general had an elevating sense of great pride last Saturday when our eight men, like the dark horse, went into the field and carried the high school athletic honors away from the two Salt Lake City schools, which the day before had been so confident of first and second place. Salt Lake rubbed his eyes and asked, 'where is the Murdock Academy?'"[65]

The intense competition among schools had a downside as well. When E. E. Ericksen arrived as principal he noted that "the people seemed more interested in maintaining first place in athletics than in scholarly achievement. My success would be judged by the kind of athletes I turned out. So I had to get to work with my young cowpunchers and sheepherders."[66] One student athlete noted: "I became very much interested in sports, to the extent that I neglected the more essential subject[s]."[67] Another stated, "I was a school pet, which athlete is not?"[68] Such enthusiasm was common among student

athletes at all the academies. The young Spencer W. Kimball, attending the Gila Academy in Arizona at roughly the same time, wrote of his experience, "I like basketball. I would rather play this game than eat."[69]

Principal Ericksen noted the blessing and cursing of athletic competition. "These victories became advertisements for students in Southern Utah. But they caused jealousies elsewhere."[70] Competition could become intense among the schools, especially rival academies, and accusations of rule breaking, violation of academic standards, and recruiting older men to compete were common.

The competition could be just as fierce among female athletes. Abigail Prestwich remembered:

> It was here at Murdock Academy that basketball was the thing. Even the girls played in their mini blouses with sailor collars and the pantaloons with elastic at the bottom. Fern played as forward and I played as guard. When Cedar came to play, we decided we were going to win. Eva Mitchell was on Cedar's team. Old Eva grabbed me by the hair, so I grabbed back. Fern hollered, 'hold her, hold her!' I did until Fern made the basket. Word got around what a rough bunch we were, so the next game, there was a big audience.[71]

The arts also played a vital role in the academy community. When Gerrit de Jong arrived as the new music teacher in 1917 he was assigned to teach "music, chorus, orchestra, band, piano, violin, individual instruments, everything."[72] The same year, the school staged a production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. The school took the show on the road, staging sold out productions in ten Southern Utah towns, from St. George to Fillmore. Given the relatively small size of the school, de Jong remarked on the impact such an undertaking could have on the academic environment. "The Murdock Academy practically closed up for the time that we were working on the opera, for ten days, because all the faculty were in on it too. Faculty and students right together in everything."[73]

Another key aspect of student life was the ecclesiastical organization of the community. A branch of the Beaver Stake met on the campus. A devotional was held each day, the Mutual Improvement Association met weekly, with Sunday school and church services every Sunday.[74] Typically, the school principal also presided over the branch, adding a spiritual dimension to his academic duties. Principal Partridge fretted that he would "have to do something to get a greater percent of the students to attend Sunday school."[75] The principal was also responsible, at least in part, for the spiritual well-being of the faculty. Part of Brimhall's instructions to Principal Anderson was for him to ask his teachers the following questions: Do they love their theology work? Do they attend to their prayers? Do they pay their tithing? And are they in perfect harmony with the school? Brimhall went on to

Gerrit de Jong Jr., date unknown. de Jong taught school in Salt Lake City, at the Murdock Academy in Beaver, and at the LDS University in Salt Lake City before joining the faculty at Brigham Young University in 1925, where he founded the College of Fine Arts and Communications and served as dean of the college for thirty-four years (1925–1959). The de Jong Concert Hall in BYU's Harris Fine Arts Center is named in his honor.

say, "I am more and more convinced that an out and out frank, open hearted, honest Gentile is preferable to a half-hearted or disgruntled Mormon in the Church schools."[76]

Teachers played an active role in bringing new students into the school. Several times a year teachers visited communities throughout Southern Utah to bring in new students. During recruitment drives teachers could become quite zealous in the pursuit of students. Ericksen recalls that he and George Luke, another teacher, could "cover an entire community in just a few hours."[77] In the evenings teachers would preach to the community. Ericksen remembered: "I was so converted that when called upon to 'say a few words' at stake conferences, I would preach a sermon on the 'eternal glory of education' and on the 'sacred mission of the Murdock Academy.' I was scolded by the brethren from Salt Lake City for attempting to make the school 'more important than the whole church.'"[78] As the academy in Beaver grew, its success led to other academies being established in the nearby communities of Fillmore, Hinckley, and St. George. This in turn led to increased competition among the academies for students. The Murdock community used the increased competition to stoke the fires of the local citizens for increased support. The school newspaper of 1910 sounded a call to arms: "The present year will see the completion of commodious and beautiful academies . . . in Emery, Millard, and Washington counties. For patronage they will invade and be obliged to draw more or less from the same territory that now supports . . . the Murdock Academy. Are we prepared for the competition?"[79]

Each of the academies, however, was competing for a slice of a rapidly diminishing pie. The academies reached the high water mark of their attendance in 1905, the same time the principals at the Murdock academy complained that they could not accommodate all of their students. The numbers stayed level for about five years, then the decade of 1910–1920 saw a sharp decline in academy attendance. At the same time, enrollment in the public schools was rapidly rising.[80]

Decline of the Academy

Opening enough Church schools to accommodate all LDS students became an increasing burden on Church funds. The academies were always a huge strain on the financial resources of the Church. With the number of public schools increasing, Church members found it increasingly difficult to support a dual system of education—one through tithing, another through taxes. Alternatives to providing religious training for youth were beginning to appear as well. In 1911, at the same time the Murdock Academy was struggling to find the funds to finish its new building, the first released-time seminary opened next to Granite High School in Salt Lake City. While thousands of dollars were needed to maintain a Church school, only $2,500 was necessary to build the seminary building at Granite High.[81] Only one teacher was needed to teach religion at a seminary, instead of an entire faculty. With costs on such a limited scale it was possible to bring seminary to nearly every community with LDS students, while the academies would always be geographically limited.[82] Church leaders saw the infeasibility of maintaining the academy system as well. Even David O. McKay, a former academy principal, recognized that maintaining the schools was "a policy that will inevitably bankrupt the Church."[83]

The situation at Murdock reflected the patterns emerging in the larger Church system. Reinhard Maeser was made principal of the school in 1918, after decades of faithful service. His term of leadership, however, was seriously hampered by the school's declining enrollment. By this time only 116 students were attending the school. Not only did competing schools cut into the academy's effectiveness, other factors did as well. During Reinhard's first year as principal, the work of the school came to a sudden halt when influenza broke out on the campus. Fears from the worldwide flu epidemic were at their height during this time, and the school closed for five weeks. Another outbreak later in the year caused the school to close for nine weeks. Trying to maintain the confidence of the families involved in the academy, Reinhard wrote to them: "Let us not lose faith or confidence in this school. You support the school and it will support you. It will give you full value for

all your expenditures and trouble, fully repay you for any financial gift or substantial acknowledgement, and best of all it will bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ forcefully before the attention of your boys and girls."[84]

In 1920 a public high school opened in Beaver. The school, which served grades six through twelve, held no high school classes, in the interest of not competing with the academy.[85] The same year, the General Church Board of Education announced a radical shift in Church educational policy. Eight of the smaller academies, including Murdock, would be closed or transferred to state control. At the same time, several schools would be devoted to teacher training, essentially becoming Church sponsored junior colleges.[86] Finally, the Brigham Young University in Provo would be elevated to the position of parent institution of the Church school system, with the junior colleges serving as feeder schools.[87]

By this time enrollment at Murdock Academy had declined to just eighty-nine students. With the school closing, Reinhard Maeser left the community he had called home for nearly four decades and transferred to BYU in Provo. In his farewell letter to the Beaver Stake Board of Education he wrote: "No labor has ever been sweeter to me, no experience I have ever had has been more valuable. It has been my daily pleading to my Heavenly Father to make me worthy of this high calling; to give me strength of character, fortitude,

A photograph depicting the campus with the large "M" on the mountain (see arrow), circa 1912–1913. Today the "M" has been replaced by a large "B," representing Beaver High, the local public high school. Photograph courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

devotion, and love; to make me adequate to the responsibility of this great undertaking."[88]

Most of the academies were transferred to state control and continued as public schools, but the same qualities which years earlier had made the site of Murdock Academy so attractive ultimately led to its demise.[89] The school's distance from the town, once considered essential to preserving the closeness of the academy community, now forced its isolation from the larger community which the public high school could serve. Its large campus, with over twenty buildings, was ideal for an academy, but unnecessary for a high school. Extensive efforts were made by the Beaver citizenry to keep the academy open. For a brief time plans were laid to convert the property into a vocational school.[90] Several citizens of Beaver even personally pleaded their case before the Church Commission of Education, but to no avail.[91] Adam S. Bennion, the Church Superintendent of Education, personally came to Beaver and explained that the school was to close, and tried to explain some of the reasons why.[92] Reluctantly the community accepted, and the school permanently closed its doors in May 1922.[93]

Legacy of the Academy

The closure of the school ended the Murdock Academy, but the legacy of the school endured. A similar story was repeated throughout the Mormon culture region of the West. Teachers and students from the academy continued to contribute over the ensuing years. Reinhard Maeser became part of the English department at BYU. Ever the consummate educator, he taught until he literally collapsed and died shortly after calling roll in one of his classes in 1926.[94] George Luke, a teacher from the academy, eventually moved to Moscow, Idaho, to teach at the University of Idaho. While there he requested and was instrumental in helping to plan and launch the first LDS Institute program. With his influence, a little piece of the academy was brought to the state universities.[95]

For the most part, the academy continued as a fond memory in the minds of its students. Mary Davis, a student when the school was known as the Beaver Branch, remembered a girl asking Reinhard Maeser what the "A" stood for on his report cards. He replied, "Those are my angels."[96] Thomas O. Durham, the 1914 student body president, remembered being given a job as school registrar, so he would have enough money to stay in school. The principal of the school at the time, J. L. Horne, also allowed Durham to room free of charge to keep him in school.[97]

Gerrit de Jong recalled that during his service as the school's music teacher a student from a poor family approached him and asked for violin

lessons. Seeing he had no money, de Jong offered to give him lessons in exchange for having the student chop his firewood. The arrangement continued for a year. When the student came back the next year, de Jong found him and said, "I can't afford to give you violin lessons for wood chopping because I need to chop my own wood." He then offered to give the student lessons for free. Reflecting on the episode years later, de Jong wrote: "My theory seemed to have been: We ought to give the students what they need. We ought not to just set a kind of set program and stick with that, hell or high water, but we ought to give them what they need."[98]

Today, only one building of the Murdock Academy complex still stands. Originally the laundresses' quarters from old Fort Cameron, the building has been converted into a private residence. The academy campus stood vacant for a number of years after its closure. Eventually all of the buildings were torn down and the materials used on other projects. Even the main academy building, used for less than a decade before the school closed, was torn down and the stone used to build a Church in the nearby community of Milford.[99] The generations who attended the academy have passed, but stories about the

The only remaining structure of Fort Cameron and the Murdock Academy, today a private home. This structure is located near the mouth of Beaver Canyon. Photograph by Casey Paul Griffiths.

school are common among their children. Even though little physical evidence remains of the academy's existence, stories and memories persist. In the last several years, some movements have begun to preserve remaining academy buildings throughout the West. The most well-known was the superb effort to renovate and restore the original Brigham Young Academy building in Provo, Utah.[100] The Mormon Historic Sites Foundation made a similar effort to save the Oneida Stake Academy building in Preston, Idaho.[101]

The academies represent a significant part of the educational history of Mormonism. In their day George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Spencer W. Kimball, Harold B. Lee, Ezra Taft Benson and a multitude of other well known Church leaders attended or taught at the Church schools. Camilla Kimball was a teacher briefly at the Hinckley Academy. The last LDS Apostle to attend a Church school was David B. Haight, a student at the academy in Cassia, Idaho, when it was transferred to state control.[102] Like the academies themselves, most of the students who attended these schools have now passed on, but the spirit of the communities they created continues on and will endure.

Notes

1. Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783–1876* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1980), 389.

2. Wilford Woodruff to the Presidency of St. George Stake, June 8, 1888, in *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 3:168.

3. John D. Monnett, "The Mormon Church and Its Private School System in Utah: The Emergence of the Academies, 1880–1892" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 1984), 121.

4. Determining the exact number of academies is somewhat problematic. While most histories list twenty-two, some LDS educational histories inflate that number by more than a dozen. William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton explain some of the reasons for these discrepancies: "Various historians have listed the Church Academies and the supposed dates of their founding. These lists show certain discrepancies. The differences arise from the fact that some academies, started on a Stake basis, in response to the request of the First Presidency in 1888, did not operate continuously due to lack of funds and proper facilities. Some were revived by direct Church appropriations, while others were wholly discontinued. Only 22 of the academies had school buildings especially erected for school purposes." William E. Berrett and Alma P. Burton, *Readings in LDS Church History from Original Manuscripts*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1953–1958), 3:336. More recently, Scott C. Esplin has examined the correspondence to appointed academy principals and determined the number of academies based on those records to be thirty-three. See Scott C. Esplin, "Education in Transition: Church and State Relationships in Education in Utah, 1888–1933" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 2006).

5. Milton L. Bennion, *Mormonism and Education* (Salt Lake City: Department of Education of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1939), 164.

6. Aird G. Merkley, ed., *Monuments to Courage: A History of Beaver County* (Beaver,

UT: Beaver County Chapter of the Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1948), 76, punctuation corrected.

7. See Thomas J. Alexander and Leonard Arrington, "The Utah Military Frontier, 1872–1912: Forts Cameron, Thornburgh, and Duchesne," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Fall 1964): 330–54.

8. "Our Present Need," *Murdock Lever* 1, no. 3 (January 25, 1910): 5, Murdock Academy Collection, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter Perry Special Collections).

9. Alexander and Arrington, "The Utah Military Frontier, 1872–1912," 339.

10. The Beaver Branch was the only branch school of the B.Y.A., making it unique among the LDS Church academies. It also provides a boon for historians, since the close supervision of the school by B.Y.A. presidents has provided a richer correspondence than currently exists for most academies. See Ernest L. Wilkinson, ed., *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, 4 vols. (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 1:253.

11. E. M. Kelly, "Our New Building," Murdock Academy Collection, Perry Special Collections.

12. "Circular of the Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young Academy, 1899–1900," Beaver Branch Collection, Perry Special Collections.

13. Alexander and Arrington, "The Utah Military Frontier, 1872–1912," 339.

14. "A Brief History of Murdock Academy, One of Utah's Leading Educational Institutions," *Beaver Press*, December 30, 1921.

15. Benjamin Cluff Jr., to Ernest D. Partridge, August 20, 1898, Benjamin Cluff Jr., Letterpress Book, UA 1093, bx. 3, fd. 7, Benjamin Cluff Jr. Papers, Perry Special Collections.

16. John Riggs Murdock (1826–1913) moved to Beaver, Utah, in 1864 at the time of his call to serve as the bishop in the settlement. In 1869 he was called as the first president of the Beaver Stake and later served as patriarch. He also served eight terms in the Utah Territorial Legislature, as a member of the Utah Constitutional Convention, and as a member of the Utah State House of Representatives.

17. Zelma Muir, "Beaver Stake Academy—Beaver, Utah," in Kate B. Carter, *Heart Throbs of the West*, 12 vols. (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1939–1951), 11:104.

18. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 250.

19. Merkley, *Monuments to Courage*, 84.

20. "Circular of the Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young Academy, 1899–1900," 6–7. During the life of the academy the price of room and board never went much above this level. For example, in the 1912–1913 circular, the cost of renting a room was listed as $1.50–$2.25 a month, and board $3.00–$3.75 a week. Near the end of the school's existence in 1921, rent was offered for free in order to attract students. "Murdock Academy Circular, 1921–1922," 5, accessed at http://www.li.suu.edu/library/digitization/murdock.html.

21. Mary K. Davis, "The Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young University," 2, unpublished paper, Beaver Branch Collection, Perry Special Collections.

22. Davis, "The Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young University," 3.

23. Davis, "The Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young University," 2.

24. E. E. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections: The Autobiography of E. E. Ericksen*, ed. Scott Kenney (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 62–63.

25. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 63.

26. John S. Crosby, "Autobiography of John S. Crosby," 5, typescript, accessed at

http://www.angelfire.com/ut/jcrosby/history/john/JSC_Autobiography.pdf.

27. "Circular of the Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young Academy, 1899–1900," 7.

28. Merkley, *Monuments to Courage*, 84.

29. Abigail S. Prestwich, "A Tribute to My Sister Fern," accessed at homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/-fhcnet/69.htm.

30. Reinhard Maeser, "Our School," *White and Blue* 11, no. 8 (March 27, 1908): 188, Murdock Academy Collection, Perry Special Collections.

31. Josiah E. Hickman to George H. Brimhall, January 17, 1908, George H. Brimhall Papers, UA 1092, bx. 13, fd. 4, Perry Special Collections (hereafter cited as Brimhall Papers).

32. Josiah E. Hickman to George H. Brimhall, January 28, 1908, Brimhall Papers, bx. 13, fd. 4.

33. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 61.

34. "Our Present Need," 5.

35. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 66.

36. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 67.

37. Merkley, *Monuments to Courage*, 86. An artist's rendition of the original building plans may be found in the *Murdock Lever* (January 1910), Murdock Academy Collection, Perry Special Collections.

38. "Murdock Academy Circular, 1909–1910," 8, 14–18, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

39. A complete list of course offering from the year 1909–1910 consisted of agriculture, algebra, art, astronomy, bookkeeping and commercial paper, botany, chemistry, domestic art, dressmaking, domestic science, draughting (drafting or drawing), economics, education, English, special elocution, geology, geometry, history, music, physical culture, physical geography, physics, physiology, psychology, shorthand, theology, woodwork, zoology, iron work, and a course in missionary work. "Murdock Academy Circular, 1909–1910," 19–35.

40. George H. Brimhall to Andrew B. Anderson, December 14, 1906, Brimhall Papers, bx. 12, fd. 2.

41. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 63–64.

42. "Circular of the Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young Academy, 1899–1900," 7.

43. "Murdock Academy Circular, 1911–1912," 19, Church History Library.

44. "Murdock Academy Circular, 1911–1912," 19.

45. Davis, "The Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young University," 3.

46. Benjamin Cluff Jr., to Reinhard Maeser, June 7, 1900, Letterpress Book, Cluff Papers, bx. 3, fd. 7.

47. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 62.

48. Benjamin Cluff Jr., to Ernest D. Partridge, November 18, 1898, Cluff Papers, bx. 3, fd. 7.

49. Ernest D. Partridge to Benjamin Cluff Jr., November 20, 1899, Cluff Papers, bx. 6, fd. 1.

50. Ernest D. Partridge to Benjamin Cluff Jr., February 2, 1899, Cluff Papers, bx. 5, fd. 3.

51. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 62.

52. Andrew B. Anderson to Benjamin Cluff Jr., October 17, 1902, Cluff Papers, bx. 8, fd. 2.

53. Josiah E. Hickman to George H. Brimhall, October 22, 1908, Brimhall Papers, bx. 14, fd. 1.

54. Andrew B. Anderson to Benjamin Cluff Jr., January 9, 1903, Cluff Papers, bx. 8,

fd. 2.

55. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 64.

56. “Murdock Academy Circular, 1909–1910,” 13.

57. Ernest D. Partridge to George H. Brimhall, December 15, 1900, Brimhall Papers, bx. 7, fd. 2.

58. “Our Present Need,” 4.

59. Ernest D. Partridge to Benjamin Cluff Jr., February 2, 1899, Cluff Papers, bx. 5, fd. 3, underlining in original.

60. Ernest D. Partridge to Benjamin Cluff, Jr., November 25, 1899, Cluff Papers, bx. 6, fd. 1.

61. Ernest D. Partridge to Benjamin Cluff, Jr., December 3, 1899, Cluff Papers, bx. 6, fd. 1.

62. Davis, “The Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young University,” 3.

63. Andrew B. Anderson to George H. Brimhall, February 4, 1904, Cluff Papers, bx. 9, fd. 3.

64. W. Paul Reeve, “Alma Richards Was Utah’s First Olympic Gold Medalist,” *History Blazer: News of Utah’s Past from the Utah State Historical Society*, February 1995, 24–25.

65. “Murdock Academy Victorious,” *The Weekly Press*, May 27, 1910, 1.

66. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 64.

67. Benjamin Lynn Mathews, “Autobiography,” accessed at http://familyhistory.mathews2000.com/autobiographies/benjamin-lynn-mathews-1892.

68. Crosby, “Autobiography of John S. Crosby,” 5.

69. Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), 65.

70. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 65.

71. Abigail S. Prestwich, “A Tribute to My Sister Fern,” accessed at homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/-fhcnet/69.htm.

72. Gerrit de Jong, oral history interview, August 8, 1978, typescript, 14, UA OH 33, fd. 14, Perry Special Collections.

73. de Jong, oral history interview, 14–15.

74. Davis, “The Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young University,” 2.

75. Ernest D. Partridge to Benjamin Cluff Jr., December 3, 1899, Cluff Papers, bx. 6, fd. 1.

76. George H. Brimhall to Andrew B. Anderson, December 14, 1906, Brimhall Papers, bx. 12, fd. 2.

77. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 71.

78. Ericksen, *Memories and Reflections*, 71.

79. “It’s Up to You,” *Murdock Lever* 1, no. 3 (January 25, 1910): 1.

80. Bennion, *Mormonism and Education*, 177.

81. Casey Paul Griffiths, “The First Seminary Teacher,” *Religious Educator* 9, no. 3 (2008): 123.

82. While the seminaries would replace the academies as the dominant vehicle for religious education in the Church, the program was very much a child of the academies. Joseph F. Merrill, the originator of the Granite Seminary program, was inspired to start the seminary at Granite after hearing his wife share stories from the Book of Mormon. When he asked her where she had learned how to teach so well, she responded that it was in James E. Talmage’s class at LDS Academy in Salt Lake City. Merrill, a member of the stake presidency, realizing that his children were missing out on such an opportunity, immediately moved to remedy the situation. See Joseph F. Merrill, “A New Institution in

Religious Education," *Improvement Era* 41, no. 1 (January 1938): 55–56.

83. Mary Jane Woodger, "David O. McKay, Father of the Church Educational System," in *Out of Obscurity: The Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 382.

84. Reinhard Maeser, Principal's Report, May 22, 1919, Reinhard Maeser Collection, MSS 1841, bx. 1, fd. 14, Perry Special Collections (hereafter cited as Maeser Collection).

85. Martha Sonntag Bradley, *A History of Beaver County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, Beaver County Commission, 1999), 187.

86. The academies elevated to junior college status included: Snow Academy (Ephraim, Utah), Weber Academy (Ogden, Utah), Dixie Academy (St. George, Utah), Brigham Young College (Logan, Utah), Latter-day Saints University (Salt Lake City, Utah), and Ricks College (Rexburg, Idaho). During the 1930s, when Church finances were strained even further, most of these schools were transferred to state control or closed outright, with the notable exception of Ricks College. See Casey Paul Griffiths, "Joseph F. Merrill: Latter-day Saint Commissioner of Education, 1928–1933" (MA thesis, Brigham Young University, 2007), 60–93.

87. Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Education, March 3, 1920, BYU Centennial History Papers, UA 566, bx. 25, fd. 17, Perry Special Collections.

88. Reinhard Maeser to Beaver Board of Education, May 21, 1920, Maeser Collection, bx. 1, fd. 14.

89. A notable exception to the academy closures is the academy in Colonia Juarez, Mexico, which continued and is still in operation. See Albert Kenyon Wagner and Leona Farnsworth, *The Juarez Stake Academy, 1897–1997: The First One Hundred Years* (Juarez, Mexico: The Academy, 1997).

90. J. F. McGregor, Timothy Brownhill, Hettie White, et al., "Confirmation of Murdock Academy as Vocational Institute is Assured," *Beaver County Weekly Press*, February 10, 1922, 1.

91. Minutes of the Meeting of the Commission of Education, October 25, 1921, Centennial History Papers, UA 566, bx. 25, fd. 9, Perry Special Collections.

92. "Murdock to Close," *Beaver County Weekly Press*, May 12, 1922, 1.

93. Merkley, *Monuments to Courage*, 87.

94. Georgia Maeser, "Reinhard Maeser," unpublished manuscript, Reinhard Maeser Collection, Perry Special Collections.

95. Dennis A. Wright, "The Beginnings of the First LDS Institute of Religion at Moscow, Idaho," *Mormon Historical Studies* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 70.

96. Davis, "The Beaver Branch of the Brigham Young University," 1–2.

97. Thomas O. Durham, "My Abbreviated Biography," unpublished manuscript, MS 7528, Church History Library.

98. de Jong, oral history interview, 15.

99. "Passing of the Murdock Academy," *Milford News*, August 12, 1932, 1.

100. See L. Douglas Smoot, *The Miracle at Academy Square* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2003).

101. See Fred E. Woods, "The Forgotten Voice of the Oneida Stake Academy," *Mormon Historical Studies* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 81–100.

102. Neal A. Harmon, "The Cassia Stake Academy: A Closer Look at the Church Academy System," unpublished paper (2001), copy in author's possession.