



James B. Allen, 1998. Photograph by Mark Philbrik, Brigham Young University.

## Balancing Faith and History: A Conversation with James B. Allen

*Interview by Alex D. Smith*

James B. Allen has been one of the pillars of the Mormon history community for the past half century—a pioneer of the “new Mormon history” and life-long advocate of truth in historical writing. In addition to numerous publications, his contributions to the field have included co-founding and later presiding over the Mormon History Association, serving as Assistant Church Historian of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, chairing the department of history at Brigham Young University, and holding the Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr. chair in Western American History.

Jim was born in Ogden, Utah, in 1927, and received his BS degree from Utah State University, his MA from Brigham Young University, and his PhD from the University of Southern California. While a graduate student in California, he was the director of the LDS Institutes at Long Beach and San Bernardino. He began teaching at Brigham Young University in the Religion department in 1963, and in the Department of History the following year. He and his wife Renée now reside in Orem, Utah. They have five children, twenty-one grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

Always interested in the Mormon experience and the lives of the Church’s individual members, Jim’s research projects have varied greatly, ranging from challenges facing the emerging international Church to contemporaneous accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision. He was one of the first historians to turn the attention of the scholarly community to a consideration of the twentieth century history of the Church, co-authoring *Mormonism in the Twentieth Century* with Richard O. Cowan in 1964. While serving as an Assistant Church

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ALEX D. SMITH ([smithad@ldschurch.org](mailto:smithad@ldschurch.org)) works for the Joseph Smith Papers Project at the LDS Church History Library as co-editor of the second and third volumes of the Journals series. He received his BA and MA degrees in history from Brigham Young University, and served as a research historian for the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History.

Historian in the 1970s, under Leonard Arrington's direction, Jim collaborated with Glen Leonard to write *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, which remains the most influential single-volume history of the LDS Church.

A few years after returning full-time to BYU from the Historical Department in 1979, Jim worked with colleague and friend Thomas Alexander on *Mormons and Gentiles: A History of Salt Lake City*. To a certain extent this represented a return to a study of Western American history begun two decades earlier with his dissertation, which was revised and published as *The Company Town in the American West*. Collaborative publications in the 1990s included *Men with a Mission, 1837–1841: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles* with Ronald Esplin and David Whittaker; and *Hearts Turned to the Fathers: A History of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 1894–1994* with Jessie Embry and Kahlile Mehr. An effort to keep prodigious research notes for many years, and then make them available to others, resulted in the ambitious project with Ronald W. Walker and David J. Whittaker to produce *Studies in Mormon History, 1839–1997*. This massive annotated bibliography of secondary sources in Mormon history is an indispensable resource for researchers, widely recognized as the first point of reference when studying new topics in Mormon history.

Jim's research and publications on William Clayton in many ways exemplify his emphases in historical writing. He became interested in Clayton while co-editing Clayton's 1840–1842 journal with Thomas Alexander, published as *Manchester Mormons*. Through this and other editing projects, including twelve years editing the *BYU Studies* "Historian's Corner," which frequently featured original manuscript transcriptions, Jim labored to make early Mormon documents more widely available to historians. His research on Clayton culminated in the award-winning biography *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, a Mormon*. Clayton was relatively representative of the rank-and-file member of the Church, and yet situated to record many significant events in early Church history and inclined to do so. The resulting biography exemplified Jim's deft touch with sensitive issues and ability to personalize history. It also portrayed a man who dedicated his life to the preservation of the story of the Latter-day Saints—Jim's own lifelong objective.

## **The Interview**

ALEX: My name is Alex Smith and I am with James Allen and his wife Renée, in their home in Orem, Utah. It's Tuesday the 24th of November 2009. I am truly appreciative of the opportunity to interview you.

JIM: You're very kind.

ALEX: Thank you for your willingness to do this. Let me start off with some basic questions. Please describe briefly events in your childhood, or growing up. Tell us about your early years.

JIM: Well, I don't know how brief I can be.

ALEX: Then don't be brief!

JIM: My mother and father met each other when they were both on missions, in the Eastern States Mission. They were married in 1925, a few years after they got back. My father lived in Coalville, Utah, and that's where they were living when I was born—although she went to Ogden to have her baby. So I was born in Ogden, Utah, but as a tiny child came back to Coalville, where my grandparents lived. My grandfather came from Ireland and settled in Coalville in 1869, and he raised his families there. (After his first wife died, his second wife, my grandmother, finished raising the first wife's family and also raised one or her own.) When I was very young my parents moved to Salt Lake City, and we lived in Salt Lake City for a while. Then, after the Great Depression became really deep, my parents moved with me and my younger brother, who had just recently been born, to Fairview, Wyoming, where my mother had grown up. Her parents were gone, but her four brothers were there. My father was able to work for a while with one of her brothers who owned a store in Fairview. So I spent a lot of my early years in Fairview, Wyoming, and then a year or two in Afton, not very far from Fairview. These towns were in Star Valley. Some of my best memories, really, are of growing up and going fishing, going camping, doing all the kinds of things that young boys love to do as they grow up in a very rural area such as that. We had no electricity, no indoor plumbing. We were living in what to some people would seem pretty primitive conditions, but they weren't primitive to us. Of course, the electricity finally came to Fairview as a result of Franklin D. Roosevelt's Rural Electrification Administration, but that was after I left.

I have a lot of good memories of playing with my friends out in the alfalfa fields, where we'd play hide-and-seek and that kind of thing. I don't want to go into too much of this, but these are just some of my most fond memories—



Jimmie, as his mother called him, on his tricycle in Coalville, Utah, ca. 1930.



Fairview, Wyoming, second grade class, ca. 1934. Jimmie is in the middle of the first row.

growing up as a child in this very rural area. I still love to go back there from time to time and still have cousins there.

When I was about ten-and-a-half we moved to Logan, Utah, where I grew up, basically. My mother had four children by then—four boys. She wanted to go to Logan very badly because she wanted to give her boys a chance to go to college. She was a schoolteacher, but my father had never gone to college. He had a variety of professions: traveling salesman most of his life, then got into mining and that kind of thing a little later in his life. But she wanted her boys to have a college education. She drilled into us the importance of schooling and the importance of education in general. And of course we all got our college education. One of my brothers didn't stay in Logan; he went to Columbia University, but the rest of us eventually graduated from Utah State University. (At that time it was called Utah State Agricultural College.)

That's a brief statement about my growing up. During World War II, just briefly, one of the things I remember is that even though I was in high school, a lot of us were, I won't say committed to going into the service, but at least we were very patriotic. World War II was a very patriotic war, and almost everybody supported it. It's not like the wars we're having these days. I joined the Utah State National Guard. The Guard had been mustered into service during the last couple of years that I was in high school. We were part of the Utah State Guard, so I think of myself as part of the home guard during World War II. We didn't have any military guns to drill with, only wooden guns or household shotguns, but at least we were there to do whatever needed to be

done in case of anything. In high school, I enjoyed drama; I was in plays once in a while, never the leading role, but at least I was involved in that kind of activity. I was involved in speech contests and various kinds of other things. I enjoyed drama, I enjoyed writing, I enjoyed working on the school paper, I enjoyed meeting the girls, and dancing. Some of my fondest memories are of an old dance hall in Logan, the Dansante. A lot of our best memories were going to dances in the old Dansante.

I have some other good memories of Logan when I was very young. For a quarter you could go get a double-decker ice cream cone, go to a movie, then go to Winget's ice cream store and get a tall milkshake, or malted milk—all at that time all on a quarter. You'd spend all afternoon seeing a double feature plus all of the other "continueds," or serials, like the Tom Mix and the Lone Ranger shows. They would continue each week from one episode to another. So we enjoyed ourselves all afternoon—all for a quarter.

ALEX: Wouldn't that be nice? Will you describe how meeting your wife took place?

JAMES: Renée lived in a house that was on my way to school from one of the houses I lived in, so I would walk right by it. We never really knew each other that well in high school, but I used to look at her a lot. Even when she was in high school she used to go with some other more popular guys. But I didn't really—

RENÉE: He was very shy! I went with all his friends.

ALEX: Your wife just spoke up from the background that you were very shy. Let's discuss that.

JIM: I don't know about that (she is probably right). Anyway, I was always interested in her but never had the courage to go up and make it known. When I was in the navy, I remember, I came home on leave one time and wanted badly to date her, but I don't think I did at that point. When we really started going together was when I was in college. I had been dating a lot of girls and she was working in Portland, Oregon. She was teaching school up there because she had graduated from college a year before I started, even though she's younger than I am. I spent three years in the navy, then two years on a mission, and in the meantime she was going to college and then went to work in Oregon. But she came back and started teaching in Logan. I dated her once, then heard that she was engaged to somebody else. I saw her one day and congratulated her on it. She was shocked, because that guy was only bragging that he was engaged to her. She didn't like him at all. He was one of these people who was pretty pushy. So I thought, *Well here's my chance*. I asked her to start going out with me, and she did.

I remember one summer—the summer of 1952—I was driving buses down in Southern Utah for the Utah Parks Company. We would go to Zion



While attending Utah State and also courting Renée Jones, Jim drove tour busses in the summer for the Utah Parks Company. In the summer of 1952, Renée accompanied him on one of the tours. This photo was taken as they visited Cedar Breaks National Park.



Jim and Renée on their wedding day, April 16, 1953.

Canyon, Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, and Cedar Breaks on a five-day tour. I invited her to go on one of those tours with me. She would spend each night with some of the girls in these various canyons where we stopped. I think by the end of that tour she decided she didn't want to have anything more to do with me. Well, not quite that bad, but she wasn't sure. But we kept going together. She was going with other guys at the time too, so when she was with them I would spend time with her mother. I thought that would be the best thing to do, because her mother liked me. Sure enough, it worked out. Her mother finally said, "Jim, why don't you just go out with another girl sometime and make sure you go where Renée can see you?" I did, and it worked. That was the end of that, and we married in April 1953. We then spent the summer working for the Utah Parks Company at the North Rim of the Grand Canyon.

ALEX: That was great advice that her mother gave you. I believe you said you learned to swim while in the navy. Is that true?

JIM: That's right. For some reason or other I had never learned how to swim. But the navy insisted that we learn to swim. Someone would almost throw you in the water if you didn't. I became a pretty good swimmer eventually. It was interesting to me how easy it was to learn how to swim, but for some reason I had always been afraid of the water. I always just stayed in the shallow end if we were at the pool. But in boot camp they insisted that we all learn how to swim and that we jump thirty or forty feet off of something into the water in case we ever had to abandon ship. Thank goodness I never had to abandon ship.

ALEX: You mentioned your mission. When you served in California, I believe you traveled for a time without purse or scrip as part of the mission's program. Will you describe that briefly? I believe that Jesse Embry may have interviewed you about this at one time.

JIM: If there's any interest in chronology, let's just back up a little bit to the military service.

ALEX: Certainly.

JIM: Like I said, I was going to high school during World War II. By the time I got out of high school in 1945, Germany had surrendered, but the war in the Pacific was not over. We felt like the war was going to go on for a long, long time. We didn't know anything about the atomic bomb at the time I finally enlisted. So right after I got out of high school I could either be drafted or enlist. My father suggested that I enlist in the navy because he said the navy was a better place to be than the army—it had better food, and other things. (I don't really know about that.) Anyway, I enlisted in the navy on what was called a *minority cruise*. That is, if you enlisted before you turned eighteen, then the navy would let you out the day before you turned twenty-one. I enlist-

ed the day before I was eighteen, so that would give me a three-year stint in the navy. I thought, *Well, I'll be getting out about the same time as my buddies who get drafted.* It didn't work out that way, because while I was in boot camp, in San Diego, Japan surrendered, and a lot of the guys who had been drafted were out within a year. I had to stay in for nearly the three years, though I was discharged a couple of months early.

I went to boot camp in San Diego. I wanted to be a radar operator, but the military operates in interesting ways. They kept me around a long time waiting for radar school to open up; there wasn't an opening. All of a sudden one day I got a call, "Allen, you're interested in communications?" "Yes." "There's an opening at the Naval Communications Annex in Washington DC. You and two other men are going to Washington DC." Well, I didn't know what the Naval Communications Annex was, but we went. I thought, *Well, I'll get into something having to do with the radio.* When I walked in the first day on duty there, someone said, "We need two men at the photo department. You and you." So I went to the photography department and became a navy photographer. I spent most of my time in Washington DC. I never did serve aboard ship while I was in the navy, but I did get two medals. One was the World War II American Theater of Operations Medal, because I did serve in some capacity during the war; and the Victory Medal. That just meant that I was in the navy at that time, that's all it meant. Oh, I also got a sharpshooter's medal while I was in boot camp. I learned to shoot well enough that I became what they called a *sharpshooter*. I don't think I could do it today.

ALEX: That's great.

JIM: Well, I thought it was good! I am also interested in one particular thing. I had a lot of good spiritual experiences while I was in the navy. I appre-



Jim joined the navy in 1945. This photo was taken a year or so later.

ciate that very, very much. In fact, years later when I was a tourist in Hawaii I went to visit the temple grounds in Laie, and one of my old buddies that I had met in navy boot camp was there as a missionary, as a tour guide on the temple grounds. He asked me, “Do you remember. . . ?” At that point I finally did remember that when we were in the navy we made a promise to each other that we would always maintain our testimonies and our commitment to the Church. While we were in boot camp, we used to read the Book of Mormon together once in a while. It was good to have friends, at least for me when I was in boot camp, who were good members of the Church. Some of us kind of kept in touch a little bit over the years, though not too much.

Before I went into the navy, I received my patriarchal blessing. One of the things the patriarch said was to the effect that I would be able to make quick decisions that would be to my benefit. I thought, *My gosh, I’ve never been able to make quick decisions!* Anyway, when I was in the photography lab in Washington DC, the chief petty officer in charge of the lab wanted me to go to photography school in Pensacola, Florida—six months schooling for photographers. I wanted to go in the worst way. He finally made arrangements for me to go, or tried to make arrangements, but I was called up one day to the personnel office. The personnel officer said, “I understand you want to go to photography school.”

I said, “Yes.” “Well, you’ve only got a couple of years left in the navy, and you’ll have to sign over; you’ll have to sign up for an extended tour.” When I asked, “How long?” he said, “Four years.” I said, “I don’t want to go another four years.” We worked on that for a while, and he said, “Well, how about three years, if we can work it out for three years?” I still said no for three years, so I went back to the lab. He called me back again and asked me, “How about two years?” “No.” Finally he got it down to one year, and at that point I was very tempted because I really wanted to go to photography



Jim on duty in the photo lab at the Navy Communications Annex in Washington DC.

school. I finally made the decision: “No I just can’t go.” He asked me, “Why not?” I said, “I’m a Mormon, and I want to go on a mission for my church. Then I want to go to school and get a college degree.” He said, “You won’t even sign over for one more year?” “No.” So he picked up the phone: “Cancel Allen’s orders.”

I thought that was the end. But just a few days later I got a telephone call: “Allen, get ready. You’re going to Pensacola.” Somehow the chief petty officer in the photo lab had pulled some strings, and I got to go to Florida anyway without signing over. I’ve always thought of that as a fulfillment of the promise in the patriarchal blessing that I’d be able to make a quick decision, because it wouldn’t have been good to spend extra time, even though I loved the navy. I enjoyed all that I did there, but I spent most of my time in Washington DC, except one winter which I spent in Pensacola, Florida.

In Florida I had a good time in photography school. I was active in the Church there. I even went out with the missionaries once in a while. I stayed close to the Church.

I also had a lot of good friends in Washington DC, and we had—oh, how should I put it?—we had an interesting time. There was a period of a few months when a group of us on Sunday evenings would go to some other church, sometimes after our own sacrament meeting, or sometimes before our own sacrament meeting. We liked to visit other churches. I remember one time a group of us went into an all-black church. It was very interesting. The people there were just as friendly as they could be, but we were the only Caucasians there. We came late, so we sat on the front row, for that was the only place left to sit. The preacher was giving a powerful, wonderful sermon. People were saying “Amen” all through the sermon; they enjoyed it immensely. It was interspersed with a wonderful choir that sang some of that great gospel music, and then the sermon would go on. Finally, when the sermon was all



Washington DC, LDS chapel.

over, the preacher said, “How many here have heard the truth?” Of course everyone in the audience raised their hands except us—six of us on the front row, three girls and three boys. “How many have heard the truth?” he asked again. Everybody raised their hand except the six of us on the front row, and it was pretty obvious. He looked down at us, smiled, and said, “Well, they came in late. They only heard half the truth!” Why I remember that, I don’t know. It was just one of the fun little things we did as a group of young people.

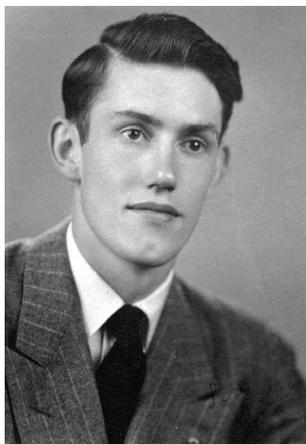
I met some friends in the Church who have remained friends ever since. That was one of my best memories of my time in the navy—the good experiences we had in the Washington Ward, and all the good friends we met. I was even called on my mission from that ward. When the bishop knew I was getting out of the navy he arranged to call me from there. When I got off the mission I had to go back to Washington and report on my mission in the Washington Ward.

We used to meet in the Washington DC chapel, which the Church eventually sold. It was a wonderful chapel, and on top was a statue of the angel Moroni. The chapel was made of bird’s-eye marble that had been brought from Utah, as I remember. It was a wonderful building, but the area around it eventually became less and less attractive to Mormons—it became very run-down. People moved out, so the Church finally sold the building to the Moonies [the Unification Church]. They still own it, but it is always a sadness to me as I drive through that area in Washington now.

My navy experience wasn’t very exciting. I did go aboard ship once—to attend a Christmas party in Pensacola!

ALEX: Let’s move to your mission for a minute and talk about that.

JIM: I was called to the California Mission. Oscar W. McConkie, the father of Bruce R. McConkie, was the mission president. I have some very good memories of President McConkie. I went in June 1948. I remember when he first met the group of us who came at that time. He came out and shook hands with all of us; he had a great big hand, bigger than any hand I ever shook. It felt like you were engulfed in a baseball mitt or something. He was just a wonderful, friendly, powerful person. He didn’t mince words if he wanted to say something, but he was also very understanding. One of the interesting things I remember about him is that he was an expert



Elder James B. Allen at the time of his mission call, 1948.

on the Holy Ghost. In fact, he had even written a little book on the Holy Ghost, and he also wrote on other doctrinal things. He felt inspired in the things he did. When he called us to go without purse or scrip he told us that the Lord had spoken to him and told him, “This is what your missionaries need to increase their faith.”

But before I get to that, I want to mention one interesting story about him. Once in a while we would meet with him in the mission home to ask questions and receive instruction. I remember that a couple of times, he didn’t quite know the answer to the question we asked. His son, Bruce, had recently been called to the First Council of the Seventy [October 1946], and Oscar McConkie was very proud of that. So when we’d ask him a

question that he didn’t quite know the answer to, he would say, “Well, I don’t know, but Bruce says . . . ,” and then with great pride quote what Bruce had said about that particular doctrine.

The president sent me to Escondido, California, and the way he sent me there was interesting. He called me into his office and said, “Elder Allen, do you know where Escondido is?” “No.” “Well, do you know anything about Sam Brannan?” I didn’t at that time. He said, “Sam Brannan was an early Mormon, and he went to Escondido and died there. We’re going to send you to Escondido!” After I’d been there for a while I wondered if I was going to die there too, because I was transferred only once, and that was to Vista, just a little ways from Escondido. They were the only two places I served while on my mission. President McConkie didn’t necessarily believe in transferring the missionaries a lot.

I went to Escondido and found a place to live. There hadn’t been missionaries there for a while. I had to wait a day or two for my companion, who had just been transferred from Arizona. (At that time the California Mission covered all of Southern California and all of Arizona, including the Indian reservations in Arizona.)



Elder James B. Allen (right) with his first missionary companion, Elder Grant Carlisle (left), serving in the California Mission, April 1949. Elder Allen spent twenty-two months traveling without purse or scrip.

We had been there for just two months when President McConkie called a special conference of all the missionaries in the South Coast District. He was going from district to district with the same message. We went over to Oceanside, where the conference was held. The message was that the Lord had spoken to President McConkie. I remember him saying it just that way. He was told that the missionaries did not have enough faith, and that they were to spend their time traveling without purse or scrip in order to increase their faith. Of course we were pretty silent; we wondered what that meant. I remember what went through my mind was, *Well, this is interesting, and I think we can probably do this for a couple of months. That's probably what we'll be asked to do.* Right then he said something to the effect that this was going to last the rest of our mission. I don't remember exactly how he put it, but I remember getting kind of a little "comeuppance" when I realized it was not going to be just a month or so; it was going to be for a while. Then he said, "So I want you to go home tonight and give up your apartments, and tomorrow you will start traveling without purse or scrip." Well, that was very sudden. We had a lot of praying to do and a lot of reconsideration of what it was all about. We were told that we could go out into the countryside—and *should* actually go out into the countryside.

When we came back and told our landlady, she was shocked, but she let us give up the apartment just fine. We talked to some members of the Church and left our belongings at the home of one of the members. Of course, all the Church members there said, "If you ever need a place to stay, come to our house," and that type of thing. They were very kind, and we did do that once in a while, especially if we would come back into town on a weekend. We would sometimes go to a Church member's place or to a nonmember who had invited us to come back. We tried not to burden the Church members, but once in a while we *would* stay with the Church members—we probably shouldn't have done that—but we felt we just had to. They were more than happy to help us out.

Our first day out was kind of a sample of what all the missionaries went through. We went out into the country, outside of Escondido, where there were a lot of avocado and orange groves. Many people made their living from raising fruit. It got along into the afternoon. How do you ask somebody for something to eat? I remember around noon asking somebody—telling them who we were. "We're missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we're traveling without purse or scrip, like the Apostles of old did. We have a message for you. Would it be possible that we could have something to eat?" Boy, that was hard! I was surprised and gratified at how willing people were. They said, "Oh yes, come in and have a sandwich," or

something like that. It was just easier than I thought it was going to be, because people were so nice.

It got along toward dark, and we hadn't found a place to stay—hadn't even asked for a place to stay that night. Finally we came to a house in the middle of a grove. I can't even remember if it was an avocado grove or a citrus grove, but it was some kind of orchard area. The lady was home alone and said her husband would be there in a little while. We talked with her for a while. She gave us something to eat, and then we said, "We need to have a place to stay tonight. Do you happen to have any place that we can stay?" "You mean you don't have any place to stay, you boys?" "No." "Well, I don't know. I'll have to ask my husband."

Pretty soon he came home. He was an old sea-captain, or at least a sea-going officer of some sort. They had an old barn outside of the house. She introduced us to him and said, "I need to talk to you." She took him off in another room. We didn't hear the conversation, except all of a sudden a raised voice from him, "You mean they want to stay here!?" I thought, *Uh-oh*. But pretty soon they came back, and he said, "Well, you boys can stay here tonight, but you'll have to sleep out in the barn." We went out in the barn, where there was an old, beat-up, dusty bed. We spent our first night in that barn, while traveling without purse or scrip.

During that time we went from that kind of experience to various others. Sometimes we'd stay in houses that were pretty luxurious; sometimes we'd sleep—two of us—on a fold-out couch in the living room of a little family, or something like that. Time after time we would ask for a place to stay, and it was amazing that we never did have to sleep out. Although some people would say they were interested, we didn't get a lot of converts, but they wanted us to come back. They were interested in our message. Hopefully, we left some seeds that were cultivated later.

ALEX: Did you often move from one place to another each night, or would you stay multiple nights in one place?

JIM: We'd go from one place to another. To me the following example is the most outstanding story of the experience. Before I was transferred from Escondido, my first companion and I went out into the countryside, clear up to Ramona and then up to a little town called Julian, which is way up in the hills in San Diego County. On the way to Julian there is a little town called Santa Ysabel, and another little town called Wynola. We made some friends in Wynola who were not members of the Church, but eventually they started coming to the little Sunday School that we opened up in Santa Ysabel. They had a little place outside of their house, a little guest house, and anytime we were there they wanted us to come and stay in that little guest house. So we did that sometimes.

The first time we were in Santa Ysabel, a Saturday, we needed to get back to Escondido for church meetings the next day. We had tracted nearly every house in town. There weren't very many, just a few little houses along the street; it was a small place. We started walking past the last house because we were trying to get a ride down to Escondido. By the way, we could not hitchhike. President McConkie forbade us from putting out our thumbs and hitchhiking, so we would just walk along the road and people would pick us up. We were never late for an appointment, never late for a meeting. We had some pretty wild rides sometimes, but we were never late! (That was always interesting to me.) So we were on the road, and we said, "Well, we'll go on to Escondido and come back to this family the next time we're in Santa Ysabel." But something stopped us. I don't know how my companion felt, but something just seemed to stop me and say, "You gotta go in there." We looked at each other and finally went in. Two men were sitting there smoking—one smoking a cigarette and one smoking a pipe. They invited us in and listened to our message. One was the son of the older man. The son drove a school bus, and after he brought the kids to school he would spend the afternoon with his father, then take the kids back to another town in another county. As they listened to us the older man said, "My wife grew up in a Mormon family." But they didn't have any record of when or if she was baptized. She thought she had been, but she wasn't sure. They were never able to find any record. He said, "She's working at the post office right now, but when you're here next time, come back and see us." I thought, *Well, we haven't done much good here. Why did we go in?*

When we went back the next time, they were there, and we met the wife too. They said, "You probably wondered about us before, but we listened to you." Then the younger man said, "My family is meeting with some of your missionaries over in the town where I live. The reason we invited you in last time is that we wanted to hear if you had the same story. And you did!"

Their name was Bailey. We met the mother. "Pop and Mom Bailey," we called them. I have never had a better spiritual experience than the nights we would spend with them when we came back to Santa Ysabel, sleeping on a fold-out couch. They didn't have any money, and once in a while their dinner would be nothing but bread and gravy. But they were so interested in the gospel and what we had to say that we had just wonderful spiritual experiences eating those meager meals and talking with them. It was a real joy when we were able to baptize Mom and Pop Bailey. The missionaries in the other county were able to baptize the son and his family.

We were able also to open a little Sunday School in the Bailey home. Those people from Wynola and a few other people came to the Sunday School, though I don't know if any of them ever joined the Church. But one other fam-

ily in the area had a Mormon background, and we were able to baptize their children, who came to the Sunday school. I don't know what happened after we left, but Mom and Pop Bailey remained very active in the Church. They couldn't get down to Escondido very often, but I remember that at one time the branch in Escondido came up to Santa Ysabel and had a party in their backyard. They accepted the Baileys very, very well. That was one of the spiritual highlights of the mission.

After ten months in Escondido I was transferred to Vista, and I had the same companion for all the rest of my mission. (I don't know why President McConkie transferred me only once.) We baptized a few people in Vista, too. We spent, as I said, the rest of my mission not knowing from one night to the next where we would sleep, except on weekends there were certain members of the Church in town at whose homes we would stay when we came back to go to church.

ALEX: Sounds like a fascinating experience.

JIM: It was. I don't know what more to tell about it. I could tell a lot of stories, but I don't want to fill a whole book.

ALEX: It would be helpful to record these stories. Let's turn and talk for a minute about what it was that first interested you in studying Mormon history. You shared the story of not being familiar with Sam Brannan, but now let's hear what you. . . .

JIM: I learned about him later on!

A couple of more things about the mission—traveling without purse or scrip. It was kind of interesting, at least to me, that President McConkie—again this is the spiritual side of the mission—was, as I said, an expert on the Holy Ghost. He believed that the only way to do missionary work was to do it by the Spirit. It was very much like what the Brethren are saying today. But it was while we were there that some of the early missionary plans began to come out. The Anderson plan was all the rage, and a number of missions began to use it. It was kind of a super-salesmanship type plan.

ALEX: Richard Lloyd Anderson, right? Who it's named after?

JIM: Yes. He was serving in the Northwestern States Mission. It was right around this time that we received copies of it. We weren't sure whether to use it or not. The mission president did not give us a copy. We got it from some other missionaries. But one day the president held a missionary conference. He was always having missionary conferences.

I have another story that took place in a meeting, not a missionary conference, but a meeting that the president wanted us to call in Vista. He said he wanted us to call all the members of the Church to the meeting because he had a message to deliver to them. At that time mission presidents were over the branches of the Church, an ecclesiastical responsibility that most of them

don't have today. At the meeting the building was full of people, and he talked about Section 76 of the Doctrine and Covenants. He went on and on for a long time, reading a passage and then commenting, then reading another passage and commenting. It was powerful. I was thoroughly enjoying it, but all of a sudden as he paused for emphasis, a little voice in the back spoke up, "Well, is he going to read the whole book?" This brought down the house! He stopped in about five minutes. He was that enthusiastic about what he had to say.

After these plans started coming out he called a missionary conference. He said, "There have been a lot of plans out, but I want to tell you what the plan of the Lord is. The plan of the Lord is fourfold. First of all, you must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here's how you get your faith. . . ." Then for a long time he talked about faith. Second, he said, "We must repent of our sins. Third, we have to baptize. Fourth, and most important, we have to get the Holy Ghost." He then spent all the rest the time talking about how to get the Holy Ghost. He said, "*That* is the Lord's plan for doing missionary work. Forget these other plans!" I don't know how our mission compared with other missions, but at least that was his attitude toward missionary plans.

While stationed in Vista we were also able to work in a little town not far away, San Marcos. We got another little Sunday school going in the home of James B. Lansing, founder of JBL, the company famous for its speaker systems. He was very prominent in that field. I don't think he was ever a member of the Church, but his wife was a member, and we got a little Sunday School going in their home.

We met several people in this area who were interested in the Church. I remember one older couple in San Marcos. I didn't know whether we were doing any good with them or not. They loved their coffee. It was never quite clear to me whether or not we were getting across to them, but we felt we needed to go back, and they wanted us to stay in their home. I'll never forget the wonderful surprise. One day when we went back, they said, "We stopped drinking coffee,"—which was really something for that family—"and we'd like to be baptized." These were the little experiences that make you think, after all the time you spend, once in a while you get a few people like that who thrill you. You see that the Spirit has actually touched them. We had a few experiences like that.

We didn't baptize a lot of people, but we did have a few highlight experiences that were the result, really, of traveling without purse or scrip, because we would meet people we might never have met otherwise. I think staying in their homes helped them feel whatever good spirit we might have had. I look back with fondness at that time, even though I see some problems, and sometimes we'd stay with a member family instead of going somewhere else. But most of the time we tried to do as we were told to do.

My beginning to get interested in Church History is related to my beginning to get interested in history at all. When I finished my mission, I knew I wanted to go to college. I started school at Utah State, unsure what I was going to major in. I had wild dreams about majoring in some kind of cultural thing where I could learn all about everything everywhere and then become a world traveler and write books about traveling the world. That never happened, of course. Finally, after my second year of college, I had to declare a major. I had been taking history classes, particularly from a young professor who started teaching there the same year that I started going to school—George Ellsworth. For some reason George Ellsworth impressed me very deeply with the thoroughness of his scholarship. He had been writing some articles on Mormon history, but he taught Western American history, and also ancient history. He was a jack of all trades. I had both an ancient history and an American history class from George Ellsworth. He inspired me to want to learn more about history. I had a couple of other good teachers. One was Dr. J. Duncan Brite, who was not a member of the Church but just a very caring teacher. He used to say some interesting things to us: “You know, a lot of you students are doing your studies on Sunday, and you shouldn’t do that. The first thing I learned in college was to get all my studies done on Friday night and Saturday so I had the rest of the weekend to relax. That’s how I got through college.” I thought, *Doctor Brite, you’re right on!* Ever since then I tried to do what this nonmember advised us to do.

I got into history partly because of the influence of George Ellsworth on me. But at the same time, there was another young man who had just finished his PhD in Western American history, Eugene Campbell, who had just come to teach at the LDS Institute at Utah State. Even though he was a history major and had his degree in Western American history, the classes I took from him were classes in the Bible and Church doctrine, particularly the New Testament class. The kind of approach he suggested was that we don’t know all the answers, but the spirit of the gospel is that you accept and believe wholeheartedly what you can, but sometimes you can hold some things in abeyance. The important thing is how you put into practice what you believe, but there is nothing wrong with you if there are some mysteries you do not understand and some questions to which you do not have all the answers. That helps a lot, because so many people are trying to find final answers to so many questions to which there are no final answers. He broadened my perspective on how to study the gospel in a very good way. I won’t go into a lot more detail on that, but it was a very good thing for me to have that kind of influence from two young PhD’s in history who became kind of my ideals. I finally decided that I wanted to follow in their footsteps, if I could.

A third teacher to have an influence on me was another non-Mormon, the debate coach, Dr. Rex Robinson. I debated all four years that I was in college. He didn't like the Church. That is, he didn't like what the Church taught, but he liked all the missionaries because they were winning debate tournaments for him! He taught me how to think and analyze in a way that a lot of people didn't. I appreciated those three men, Professors Ellsworth, Campbell, and Robinson, very much.

By the time I finished college I had decided that I wanted to teach. I got a secondary teaching certificate, and Eugene Campbell suggested that I try to get into the seminary system. He introduced me to the right people. Partly because of that I was able to get interviewed and get a job in the seminary system. I didn't decide at that point that I wanted to spend my life writing Church history. But of course that moved my interest toward doing more in the area of the history of the Church, although the first article I ever published had nothing to do with Church history. When I was a senior I took a class from George Ellsworth that normally only graduate students took. I had finished all my undergraduate requirements, so I decided to get into this class on how to write history. I was surprised that the class wasn't offered to undergraduates. I had finished my requirements for graduation. Another member of that class was a young economics professor at Utah State who was just deciding he wanted to become a historian too. He was just about ready to finish his PhD in economics at the University of North Carolina, but he wanted to write history. He had written a wonderful doctoral dissertation on the economic history of the Church in the Great Basin. It was finally published as *Great Basin Kingdom*. Of course, this man was Leonard J. Arrington. I got acquainted with Leonard in George Ellsworth's class. I was excited about the kinds of things he did. In this class I didn't write on Church history, I wrote on county boundaries in the Territory of Utah—the changing nature of county boundaries. I was able to give that paper at Phi Alpha Theta (the history honor society) meeting in Salt Lake City. The editor of the *Utah Historical Quarterly*, A. Russell Mortensen, happened to be there and he wanted to publish it. During my first year teaching seminary, I spent time rewriting that article, and it was published in the *Utah Historical Quarterly* in 1955—as I say, the first article I ever published. I give George Ellsworth and this editor credit for getting me started in the publishing business. That article, though it was only tangentially related to LDS history, led me to feel that I might want to continue to work in the history of the Church.

I taught seminary in Kaysville for a year, beginning in the fall of 1954. Then I was sent to Wyoming to establish the early morning seminary program in northwestern Wyoming (the Big Horn Basin) and southern Montana. So I was coordinator for early morning seminaries in that area. I also taught semi-

nary in Cowley and Byron, Wyoming. I stayed there for two years. During that time I worked on my master's degree at BYU, and then my wife and I decided it was time to go to another graduate school and obtain a PhD.

While I was teaching seminary in Kaysville and then in Wyoming, we spent our summers in Logan living with my wife's parents. I went to school at BYU the summers of 1954, 1955, and 1956, working on my master's degree. We spent part of one summer, five weeks, living in Provo. The other summers I would commute from Logan on weekends. One of the summers, Eugene Campbell and Leonard Arrington were both teaching summer school at BYU. I would ride back and forth with them, so I became better acquainted with these two great historians at that particular point.

My master's thesis dealt with the development of county government in the territory of Utah, so it was an extension of the paper I wrote for George Ellsworth. In the process I realized that there was really not much separation between church and state in the territory of Utah. I began to realize that more fully, especially as I looked at county government, because the people who were the bishops and stake presidents were also the county probate judges. The judges were the executive authority in the county as well as members of the county court, which was the legislature for the county. There just wasn't much separation of power—the probate judge held executive, legislative, and judicial authority in the county. Neither was there much separation between church and state, for as I said, the judges were often also bishops or stake presidents. We got into some interesting details about the relationship between the Church and the county government as we developed that thesis. I can't say that's what interested me in doing more about Church history, but at least it was one of the things that helped on the way. By the time I got to the University of Southern California in the fall of 1957 I had pretty well made up my mind that I wanted to write my PhD dissertation on a Mormon topic, because I wanted to go ahead and just write Mormon history. That was the transition, where I felt like that this was what I wanted to do.

I started school at USC, and the seminary and institute people were nice enough to help me out. I was made assistant coordinator of the early morning seminaries in Southern California. I had time to go to school and also work.

ALEX: So you had applied to the program at USC before being offered a change in position with the seminary?

JIM: That's right. I applied at two or three schools, and I applied for scholarships. The University of Southern California gave me a full-tuition scholarship. I had to buy my own books, but I had the scholarship, and I was able to keep it for all the years I was taking coursework at the USC. I was very pleased with that.

Even with the scholarship I also needed to work. William E. Berrett, who was in charge of the seminaries and institutes, worked out the assistant coordinator job. After I had been there a year, Paul H. Dunn, the coordinator for all the institute programs in southern California, invited me to join the institute faculty USC, and that's how I went from the seminary program into the institute system of the Church.

When I finished my PhD degree (I'm jumping ahead right now), I was kind of interested in going to BYU, and the vice-president of the university invited me to join the religion faculty. So I came to BYU in 1963 and taught religion for one year. At that time Eugene Campbell, my old mentor and friend from Logan, was chairman of the history department. I had said to the religion people, "I would be glad to come but would you give me time to teach a history class?" They said yes they would, but they never did. When Eugene Campbell invited me to come to the history department, I said I would like to come. "But will you give me time in my load to teach a religion class?" He said he would, and he kept his promise! So I was able to teach religion for another three or so years, even after I had joined the history department.

ALEX: What religion courses were you teaching?

JIM: I taught a little Church history and some Book of Mormon classes. Now, back to Southern California. I started at USC in 1957 and began taking coursework in Western American history and also some other fields. My chairman was Donald Cutter, an expert in the Spanish Southwest, but also in general Western American history. When it came time to talking about a dissertation topic, I told Professor Cutter that I was interested in doing something on Mormon colonization, maybe comparing Mormon colonization methods with other kinds of methods or that type of thing. He thought for a while and said, in effect, "Look, why don't you write on a non-Mormon topic? You're going to be writing Mormon history all your life [I guess he was anticipating], but you really need to make your name in some other field too." At his suggestion I started doing a little study on company-owned towns in the American West. I did a couple of papers—one on a little town named Trona in California and another on another company town. I decided that this would be an interesting topic. I finally ended up doing a dissertation on the company-owned town in the American West. It was eventually published, after some revision, as a book, *The Company Town in the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966)—the only book ever published as a general overall study of company-owned towns. People who were in urban history cited that book for many years. What Cutter said was clearly the right thing to do. It helped out in a number of ways.

After that, most of my writing had to do with Mormon history. I taught at the University of Southern California institute for a while. Also, those of us at

the institute taught institute classes at various other campuses in the area. In fact, we spent a lot of our time on the road because we had classes at this or that college all over the place. During one year, I went out to San Bernardino once a week. Finally, in 1961, my wife and I moved down to Garden Grove, California, because I was made director of the institute at Long Beach State College. The following year I was transferred to San Bernardino, where I was director of the institute at San Bernardino Valley College for a year. The following year I got my job at Brigham Young University.

ALEX: Since you have mentioned some of your earlier publications—what have been some of your favorite research topics, in terms of articles or books you have written? We'll get into the William Clayton biography later, but what else stands out as a fun thing to research.

JIM: That's an interesting question, but let me focus on a few articles first. I've had a specific purpose in writing most of the articles I've written. I guess we all have purposes in mind: we want to expound on or explain more fully one thing or another. Some of the articles I wrote grew out of some of my teaching experiences, and some of those have been especially important in my life. For example, I published an article on the League of Nations controversy in Utah, in which I dealt with differences of opinion amongst some of the Brethren on whether or not the United States ought to join the League of Nations. There were pretty fundamental differences, and these clearly became public. The background of that article came right out of my teaching, or at least my role as a professor at BYU. I felt that one of the things I was responsible for was to help young people who were having problems that dealt with issues that come up in Church history and that would sometimes challenge their faith. I spent lots of time just talking with students—and hopefully helping students—who would find things that they had never been taught about in Church classes they had taken, some things that happened which they couldn't quite understand. For example, in the 1960s, when our country's membership in the United Nations was controversial, Elder Ezra Taft Benson, a Republican, was one of those people who strongly and publically denounced the United Nations. At the same time, President Hugh B. Brown, a Democrat and a member of the First Presidency, was a supporter of the United Nations. At one time Elder Benson came to BYU and spoke very pointedly on that issue, making it absolutely clear where he stood. The next week, or within a few weeks, President Hugh B. Brown came down and took exactly the opposite position on the same issue. I remember a girl came to me very confused, asking, "How can the Brethren disagree on this? I thought the apostles were supposed to be united on everything." She felt that anything that came across the pulpit at BYU, or any place else, from a General Authority had to be the Church's position, even though President Benson usually made it clear, when

he spoke politically, that he was giving his personal opinion. But some people never heard that. He was an apostle, so what he said to them was the Church's position.

About that time I had been doing a little study on the League of Nations controversy in Utah. After those conflicting addresses, and after hearing from students such as that girl, I began to think I ought to write an article, or at least be able to talk to my students, about something similar that had happened in the past. I wanted to relate an episode that involved actors who were now all deceased, but where the Brethren disagreed with each other on political issues even though they were united on issues that mattered in terms of the doctrine and the faith of the Church. I found the League of Nations controversy perfect for what I wanted to do for my students. I gave talks on it, and I brought it up in class when it was appropriate. It seemed to help some students out very much. But then, to my surprise, one student came to me—I think he was a senior in history or something related—and said, “Brother Allen, this has been very interesting. I would like to write an article on that. Can I have all your notes?” Needless to say, I was shocked. I said to myself, *Hey, I'm not going to let him get away with that!* So I worked it up as a paper and gave it as a presidential address when I was president of the Mormon History Association. It was finally published in *BYU Studies* (Autumn 1973) as “Personal Faith and Public Policy: Some Timely Observations on the League of Nations Controversy in Utah.” That article grew out of a specific purpose, and it was one of my most satisfying experiences in terms of writing something that I thought might do my students, and others, some good.

I could tell stories about all of the things I have written, but another of the most interesting to me is the story of writing about Joseph Smith's First Vision. I have been very interested in the various different accounts of the First Vision. The first time I was even made aware there could be something there to write about was when Paul Chessman wanted to do his master's thesis, and he asked me to be his chairman. He told me about the 1832 account of the First Vision which he had discovered. I don't think he was the actual discoverer, but he was the first one to bring it to my attention and to the attention of historians generally. Most of us knew nothing about it. He wrote his master's thesis, but didn't do any more with it. While he was working on it, I wanted to read that account. I hope people realize there is a spiritual dimension to the things I try to write—maybe not all things, but at least on things related to Church history—and this was one of the topics where that dimension was present. I went to Salt Lake City and asked Earl Olson, who was in charge of the Church Archives, if I could see that manuscript. He said no, it was too delicate, but he would let me see the microfilm copy of it. I put my head in a microfilm machine and saw in Joseph Smith's handwriting that first, very

powerful, account. There is practically no punctuation in it, the spelling is poor, and the grammar is not the best. But it's powerful! I've very seldom had such a powerful feeling come over me—that "This is true!" So I decided I had to write some things on the First Vision. Eventually I posed several questions about it. When did we first begin to use the First Vision, or when did we first begin to publish it to members of the Church? When did Latter-day Saints first become aware of it? When did we first begin to use it in the way we use it now, to teach lessons and so forth? I first published an article that dealt with some of these questions in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* titled "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought" (Autumn 1966), and later a kind of extension of that article in the *Journal of Mormon History* titled "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought" (1980). Meanwhile, we were being made aware not only of that first account written by Joseph Smith but also of other accounts written during his lifetime. (See the first general article on this topic by Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies*, Spring 1969.) The editors of the *Improvement Era* recognized that the various accounts of the First Vision were now coming out, and that the whole thing was becoming controversial. I don't fully understand why the fact that there were different accounts became all that controversial, except that perhaps the critics of the Church were grasping for something. But people who are critical of Joseph Smith and the Church will find anything they can, and if there is a little difference between some of the accounts they'll say, "Oh, then none of it is true." That's ridiculous. Nevertheless, they were there with their nay-saying, and the *Improvement Era* wanted an article on it. So far as I know, I think that mine was the first article to be published in a Church magazine dealing with the various different accounts of the First Vision. It was titled "Eight Contemporary Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision—What Do We Learn from Them?" appearing in the April 1970 *Improvement Era*. Of course, all this enhanced my own commitment to and testimony of the First Vision. I hope people understand that when they read the things I wrote about it. Those are a few of the articles I considered quite significant.

Another article I wrote at the request of a Church magazine was on change, and the way change takes place in the Church. The story of how that article came into being is interesting. It began in 1974 while I was Assistant Church Historian. I received a letter from Doyle L. Green, editor of the *Ensign*, dated May 8. It began, "You have been cleared by the First Presidency to assist with a special project for the Church. The Brethren have directed that consideration be given in the Church magazines concerning the important subject of revelation: how the principle of revelation operates, how and why changes have been made in the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, and related

subjects.” The letter also said that the Brethren had discussed changes that had been made in some writings and felt that “it would be unwise and improper to attempt to suppress or ignore these matters as they are brought to light.” I was invited, along with several other people, to a special meeting on May 21. At this and subsequent meetings, a number of assignments were made with the idea that the *Ensign* would publish a series of articles dealing with these and other somewhat controversial issues. The editors didn’t want to deal with them in such a way that it looked as if we were deliberately responding to the enemy, so to speak, but they wanted to still have the material there so that people could refer to it when they needed to. It would be a positive approach. Jay Todd, the managing editor, asked me specifically to write an article on change in the Church. I was enthusiastic about the project, but it was another five years before it was eventually published in the *Ensign* (July 1979) under the title “Line Upon Line.” A lengthy subtitle, written by the *Ensign* staff, read, “Church history reveals how the Lord has continually added to his people’s knowledge and understanding,” but the article actually dealt with various changing practices, with a little emphasis on doctrine. I don’t remember how many other articles grew out of that series of meetings.

I worked on my article for quite a while, and despite the original encouragement, it became a bit controversial. It came back from the editor of the *Ensign*, Doyle Green, edited with green ink. I don’t know whether he used green to represent his name or not, but he wanted a lot of changes made, including crossing out all references to *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (which had become a controversial journal by that time) and other things. I understood that, and it didn’t bother me that much, but I was concerned about other changes he wanted. However, the article was not to his liking, and the editors were afraid it wouldn’t pass through Correlation. I didn’t know quite what to do, but one of the young assistant editors of the *Ensign* (my memory is that it was Orson Scott Card—he doesn’t remember this, so I may be mistaken, but I think I am right) said, “I think I can modify it in such a way that it will get through Correlation.” He did, and it passed Correlation, but even though he did a good job under the circumstances, I was not satisfied with it. It didn’t say exactly what I wanted it to say in the way I wanted to say it. But that version finally got to the desk of Dean L. Larsen, who was a member of the Seventy and also, by that time, editor of the *Ensign*. He called me up and said he had read the article but thought it could be improved.

We talked for a while. The things he said reflected some of the things that had been taken out of the original article. There was nothing in the original article that he or I considered really controversial, it was just something that somebody in Correlation felt might raise a question in the minds of some Church members. “Dean,” I said (we were long-time friends), “you need to

see the first article that I wrote, the original manuscript.” So I sent it to him, and he liked it much better. He made a few very good suggestions and encouraged me to resubmit it. I did so and, after reading it, the editors sent it to Elders Bruce R. McConkie and Boyd K. Packer. Brother McConkie thought it was fine, though he made a couple of little suggestions which we responded to. I asked either Elder Larsen or Jay Todd, “Well, how does Brother Packer feel?” He said, “He thought it was okay.” I didn’t know quite how to interpret that! But he didn’t disapprove, and that was the important thing to me.

We published it, and it actually included every topic and most of the wording in the original article which the *Ensign* was afraid would not pass Correlation. The discussion of some of the topics was condensed, and the original rather philosophical introduction (which was really not essential to the article) was gone, but what I considered the essentials were there. These included discussion of the gradual development of our understanding of the Godhead and a discussion of the “law of adoption,” both of which someone along the way had urged be eliminated. Yet it got through the Brethren, and it received many nice comments from people who felt that it filled a little knowledge hole and was needed by some members of the Church.

That was a nice follow-through for me, at least, given that sometime earlier I had been also asked to write an article on change for the *New Era*. I wrote the article—which was a little different, for it was geared specifically toward the youth—and turned it in, but it was sent back because the Correlation committee did not think it appropriate. I still have the note somewhere, saying that they just did not think that young people were ready to hear about change.

This blew my mind, because I think that one of the most important things we can do, as historians, is to open people’s minds to the fact that things *do* change, but some things are also constant. That’s what we tried to emphasize in these Church articles—not only change but that change comes by way of revelation and that certain fundamentals also remain constant amid all that change. That’s the idea we were trying to get across in those articles.

I think that answers your question about articles that have been particularly interesting and important to me.

ALEX: Thank you. Like you say, it’s nice to feel vindicated by having the Brethren approve the second article.

JIM: I don’t know whether “vindicated” is the right word. I’m just happy that somebody liked the *Ensign* article and was willing to publish it.

ALEX: Maybe we could talk for a minute about *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*. I’ll begin with a question: Where do you begin when trying to undertake covering the history of the Church in a single volume, and how did that project come about?

JIM: I was appointed Assistant Church Historian in 1972. Davis Bitton and I were appointed at the same time, to work with Leonard Arrington. One of the first things Leonard wanted to do was expand the staff. He brought in a large group of people who had training in history and writing, because the Historical Department was now going to embark on actually publishing history, which it hadn't done much of before. At that time there was a reorganization of the Historical Department into three divisions: the History Division, headed by Leonard J. Arrington; the Archives Division, headed by Earl E. Olson; and the Library Division, headed by Donald T. Schmidt.



Leonard Arrington (center) was appointed LDS Church Historian in 1972. James B. Allen (left) and Davis Bitton (right) were appointed Assistant Church Historians.

The History Division was the one responsible for writing history—not just *keeping* history, but writing and publishing history.

Leonard had to get every project approved, and among them was a project for two single-volume histories of the Church. One of them would be a history that would be published by a non-Mormon press, basically for the non-Mormon audience. That was eventually written by Leonard and Davis Bitton together: *The Mormon Experience*, published by Knopf in New York in 1979. The other one was to be a volume written primarily for members of the Church, but hopefully also acceptable to scholars generally, because it would incorporate all the new scholarship. The idea was that it would be faith-building to the members of the Church, but also deal with issues sometimes glossed over in some traditional writings. We would deal with issues and ideas to the degree that they were important to understanding the Church and its history. We weren't going to simply dig up things that weren't important.

I was assigned to that project, but Leonard was also able to get Glen Leonard, who at that time was working for the Utah Historical Society, to join the staff of the Historical Department of the Church. Glen and I were asked to work on that project together. I must add, there could seldom be a cooperative

writing experience any more satisfying than my working with Glen Leonard on the project. It was just amazing to me how close we were in our ideas on what ought to be done, and even our writing style. When we finished the book, the final typescript went through my typewriter, but there was very little, if any, change in the material Glen wrote. You can't tell by reading it who originally wrote which chapter, because we were so close together in our cooperation and our writing. I was very pleased with that kind of association.

Glen and I started out by working together prayerfully and outlining what it was that we wanted to accomplish, deciding where the chapter divisions would be, and that kind of thing. We decided to divide the book into five different sections and have a general introduction to each section. One of the most challenging things we wanted to do was to include a comprehensive bibliography. About a fourth of *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* is this massive bibliography, where we indicate chapter by chapter all the best published sources, whether we used them or not, that applied to things in that chapter. We received many good comments on that bibliography. Some people didn't like it because it included a lot of references to things published outside the Church, but we thought they were important for understanding. We worked on the book for over three years; it was finally published by Deseret Book Company in 1976.

We were not required to submit our books to the Correlation Committee, for everyone understood that these were not to be considered "official" Church publications. But we did submit the manuscript to Elder Joseph Anderson, managing director of the Historical Department. He approved it before we sent it to Deseret Book. Yet even though the book was well accepted and highly praised by Church members generally, as well as by non-LDS scholars, there was some criticism of the book by certain people who were not comfortable with some aspects of it. I don't want to go into the details of the criticism, but it is true that somebody from the Correlation Committee had it reviewed by someone who was predisposed not to like the kind of thing the newer Mormon scholars were doing. As a result, it was criticized in a way we thought quite unfair. Elder Benson picked up on that and in a public address, while not naming the book, he criticized some of the things which some critics had said were in the book. Actually, what was said in the book was not quite the way it was reported to him; still, he repeated them in his address. It was a very distorted view of what was in the book. So it caused some problems, and it caused Deseret Book to take the book off the shelves for a while. It was rather gratifying to me that later on we heard that President Kimball had read the book and enjoyed it. He said, "I don't see any problem with it." He couldn't understand the criticism. He told Elder Marvin J. Ashton, president of the board of Deseret Book, that it was a great work, and that he could not



James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard reviewing the manuscript of *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 1976.

comprehend why anyone would think otherwise. The behind-the-scenes story is in Leonard Arrington's *Reflections of a Church Historian*. In addition, I was honored when Elder Howard W. Hunter, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve, talked with me at length about how good he thought the book was, and how sorry he was about the criticism it had received.

As I said, we had gotten it approved first by Elder Joseph Anderson, managing director of the Historical Department, so we thought everything was fine. We were rather shocked and a little bit dismayed—well, more than a little bit dismayed—when all that criticism came. But the book received good reviews. Interestingly, some people outside the Church who reviewed it said it was a very nice start in the direction of better history. A few people inside the Church, like my good friend George Ellsworth said, “This is a start but it’s not good enough yet!” You get all kinds of reviews, and if you can’t take some criticism then you had better not write history. That was one of the first lessons I learned as a historian—if you can’t take criticism don’t write. Period.

We wondered what to do about the negative comments. Leonard Arrington’s point of view was don’t do anything, just let it go. I felt, too, that the more you talk about it, the more it aggravates the situation. So we just let it go. We tried not to criticize anybody, just understand why people have dif-

ferent points of view. Again, it was gratifying when we understood that many of the Brethren liked it and couldn't understand the criticism. As I understand it, only three or four were critical. It was very nice, some years later, when I saw a copy of a talk entitled "Reading Church History" that had been given at a CES symposium by Elder Dallin H. Oaks. In one section of the talk he used four different examples of how you can tell by what someone writes whether they believe, do not believe, or seem ambivalent. His example of someone who clearly believed in the First Vision by the way they wrote about it was *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*.

As I said, Deseret Book took it off the shelves for a while but then put it back on. When the first printing was sold out, the publishers asked us if they could reprint it. We said, "Do you want us to make any changes?" "No, no. We want to reprint the first edition as is." So the criticism didn't affect the publication of the book. Later on the editors asked us for a revised edition. "How do you want it revised?" we asked. They said, "Whatever you want to do." There was no hint of any criticism. But in preparing the second edition, we did pay attention to some of the criticism; we made a few minor changes or added explanations that might help. For example, one of the criticisms was that we put the Word of Wisdom in the context of the temperance movement of the time and thus promoted a "naturalistic" explanation, rather than the idea that it was a revelation. The Word of Wisdom *was* given in the context of the temperance movement of the time, but the critics implied that we had left the impression that it was *only* in response to that, and that it was not a revelation. That was grossly misleading, for we actually used the word *revelation* in the discussion. We said that it came during the height of the temperance movement, and it was pretty obvious that we were trying to say that Joseph Smith knew what was going on around him. There were temperance societies all around him, including in Kirtland, and that movement naturally raised questions in his mind about how the Saints should respond. Our clear implication was that it was in this context that the Prophet asked his own questions and received the revelation. To quote directly from the book: "At first written 'not by commandment or constraint, but by revelation and the word of wisdom,' this revelation eventually became a standard of health as well as a symbol of obedience among the Latter-day Saints." And of course it was only after asking questions that Joseph Smith received many, if not most, of his revelations. The critics also complained that this was not the way Brigham Young told the story. This was true, but we wrestled with the fact that Brigham Young was not even there when the revelation was given and that he did not tell the story so often quoted until over thirty years later. We were not even sure of his source for the story. But in the second edition we made it even more clear, so that the point could not be missed: the Word of Wisdom was a revelation, giv-

en under the circumstances described. We also added the story that Brigham Young told. We took out nothing; we just added the idea that in addition to the questions raised in the larger context, it appears that “an immediate situation close to home played a key role in calling forth the inspired code of health.” Then we wrote that many years later Brigham Young reported on what happened in the School of the Prophets, which was the immediate impetus for the revelation. We quoted the story as he gave it in an 1868 sermon. We hoped all that would satisfy any latent concerns.

ALEX: Not to focus on the criticism of the first edition, but did the feedback result in discussions in the Historical Department about the way you would approach writing history? Did it raise concerns of which you might not otherwise be aware?

JIM: I don’t remember the specifics of the discussion, but yes, it did raise some questions. Again, Leonard Arrington, who had the final say, so to speak, said we must continue to do what we were doing. It was not the kind of thing that was going to hurt anybody’s testimony. In fact, in connection with *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, we received story after story of people whose faith was enhanced by it. I remember one returned missionary, having returned from England, who stopped me on campus at Brigham Young University. He said, “I gave a copy of that book to a girl who was investigating the Church.” It had converted her to the Church. “And now I’m married to her!” We received stories like that! That’s what we were trying to do—write things in a way that would not ignore context and not ignore difficulties that may have occurred, but put them in a context that was understandable to members of the Church. That’s how Leonard felt we ought to be writing our history. I remember him saying time after time, “I have never found anything in all the documents I’ve been through that give me reason not to have faith in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.” We all felt the same way.

Sometimes members of the Historical Department would deal with points people didn’t feel comfortable with. For example, Davis Bitton and Gary Bunker, of BYU, published a book dealing with cartoons about Mormons that had been published in *Harper’s Magazine* and other publications in the nineteenth century. It was a delightful book, and they didn’t criticize the Church. They just said that here was the public image of the Church as expressed in those publications. Some people didn’t like that book. It wasn’t an official project of the Historical Department, just something authors did on the side because it interested them, and it was important to understanding some aspects of our history. As a department we felt strongly that we still needed to publish history that was honest, not feeling required to make every paragraph somehow prove the faith, yet not be destructive of the faith. Our personal belief should

be clear through the tone of our writing. Some things nevertheless became controversial.

Finally, the Brethren, particularly after G. Homer Durham became the managing director of the Historical Department, felt it was better not to have professional history come out under the direct auspices of the Historical Department of the Church, because it would look too official. In hindsight I think that was probably not a bad decision for the time. When something comes out that looks official, any criticism comes right back on the Church. Most members of the History Division were then transferred to BYU to become the basis for the newly created Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History. I had resigned a little earlier because I could see the “handwriting on the wall” and was encouraged by the dean of our college to come back to BYU full-time. So in 1979 I came back to BYU. I didn’t resign under any pressure or anything like that. It just looked like it was time to move, so I moved back to full-time in the BYU Department of History.

I might add that, as I have so often noted, part of the story of the Church is that things change. It may seem ironic to some people that in 2005 the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute at BYU was closed, and people who had been transferred there thirty-five years earlier were transferred back to the Church History Department and are now deeply involved, officially, in producing scholarly history.

ALEX: Our discussion could go on eternally about your time with the Historical Department. But before we move on, do you wish to make any general remarks or impressions about your time there, either favorite stories, impressions, or working relationships—things like that?

JIM: Memories dim a little, and I need to go back and read my diary, but it was an exhilarating time—because we were writing worthwhile things. The biography of William Clayton was one of the most fun books I’ve ever written, a totally enjoyable project. I did that while I was there. Earlier I published a book titled *Manchester Mormons: The Journals of William Clayton 1840–1842* (co-edited with Thomas G. Alexander, 1974). I published a number of articles that were, I think, fairly important in one way or another. But we also started or helped enhance the career of many young people. Leonard Arrington brought in people who were working on various kinds of projects and was able to get grants for them. A number of people who later became prominent in various ways did some of their early work through the Historical Department. Some people who were already prominent, like Richard Bushman and Eugene England, got fellowships and began working on some of their projects that were eventually published. David Whittaker worked on some of his projects through a fellowship at the Historical Department of the Church. The work of Ron Esplin and Bill Hartley, who were full-time

employees—and I could name others—did the wonderful things they did with full encouragement. Some of us still had to teach classes, so we couldn't put in all the time we wanted to. Some of these other people were full-time, which was important. Another thing that came out of that era was a nice early beginning of greater emphasis on women's history. Jill Mulvay Derr came into the department early; Maureen Ursenbach Beecher was an early member who came in to help us with our writing, but she also pioneered a lot of women's history, and to see that kind of work begun in the Historical Department of the Church was exciting. We can see the legacy of that period of time in so many things that are happening today. Even the Joseph Smith Papers Project, if you will, had a kind of beginning there. One of the spearheaders of the current Joseph Smith Papers project was Ron Esplin, who began working on various documents, including the Brigham Young papers, while he was there and became committed to the publication of documents. Later on, as director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute, he got the Joseph Smith project going; then it was finally transferred to Salt Lake City, where it is now. The whole legacy of the Historical Department experience is very important, I think, and very interesting to me. I was just happy to be a part of that particular legacy, and while I was there I published a few worthwhile things.

ALEX: Thank you. Speaking of things you published that are worthwhile, what interested you in working on a biography of William Clayton? Let me add a quick little note here. For those of us who work in Church history, William Clayton's record, particularly of the Nauvoo years, is immensely helpful and important. But for many people, you are dealing with the fact that they know William Clayton only as the author of "Come, Come, Ye Saints." So in trying to educate members of the Church about his significance, or just for your own self, how did you become interested?

JIM: The thing that interested me first happened when I was at BYU, just before I went to the Historical Department. A descendant of William Clayton who owned the Manchester diary of Clayton—it was at BYU, but his family still owned the diary—came to the chair of the Department of History, who at that time was DeLamar Jensen, and said they would like to have the diary published. As my memory serves me he said the family would be willing to officially donate the diary if they could find someone who would publish it. DeLamar called me in and asked me if I was interested. I thought about it for a while, then decided, "Sure, why not? I'd like to do that kind of thing." I found the diary fascinating and thought it really did need to be published. I started to work on it, and then, after I was appointed Assistant Church Historian, invited Tom Alexander to work with me. I still spent a great deal of time on the project, and it was published by Gibbs Smith, the editor of Peregrine Smith Press, at the behest of Davis Bitton. They planned to start a Mormon diaries

publication series, and Davis was going to be the general editor. However, this was the only one they ever published. It was titled *Manchester Mormons: The Journal of William Clayton 1840 to 1842*, and it came out in 1974. The diary takes him all the way to Nauvoo.

But I was so fascinated with William Clayton that I thought I'd like to do a little bit more on his life. So I started working on anything I could find on him and wrote a manuscript. But there was a big hole in the manuscript; it didn't say very much about William Clayton in Nauvoo. I knew of the existence of his Nauvoo diaries, and I'll be eternally grateful to G. Homer Durham for helping me to obtain access to them. I went to him and said I had been invited to give a talk on William Clayton at Graceland College, the Reorganized Church's college in Lamoni, Iowa. I said I would love to see those diaries, because I wanted to talk about Clayton in Nauvoo, and the diaries were the only place where I could get the information I needed; and I was writing this biography anyway. Thank goodness he was able to get permission for me to read those diaries. That changed my whole approach to William Clayton, because I saw so much about his association with Joseph Smith and the richness of life in Nauvoo, as well as some of the problems too. It was that little start of publishing that original diary that got me interested, and we went from there.

ALEX: I believe that Jan Shipps made a statement that the chapter "One Man's Families" from the Clayton biography was, at the time, the best thing she had read about plural marriage, even saying it was worth the price of the book. Can you tell me how approaching that chapter worked, when you had all the information—particularly from his Nauvoo diaries—about his plural marriage relationships? Was there any trepidation in writing a chapter like that for a largely Mormon audience?

JIM: You've posed a number of questions. First, I decided I had to make this book a combination of chronological and topical approaches. Actually, I wasn't able to find enough in-depth material on the last years of Clayton's life to do the same kind of thing that I had done for the Manchester and Nauvoo years. So much of the book is a topical in approach. One of the topics, because he had ten wives, was obviously going to be William Clayton and his families. When I got into it I realized that here was a wonderful example of the way plural marriage could have affected the lives of various kinds of people, because I found just about every kind of situation. I found the first wife accepting her sister as the second wife, and being very accepting. I had to read between the lines on some of these things because we don't have the women's accounts, which I wish we had, but you can read what Clayton says about their reaction, and you can read between the lines that for the most part they got along very well. In his diary and some of the letters you can see that at least the first three wives got along quite well with each other. They even accepted the

seventeen-year-old Diantha Farr when she became a plural wife. And there's the beautiful story of how he wrote "Come, Come, Ye Saints" as a result of this young plural wife back in Nauvoo having a baby. There are also stories of divorce, which was not unusual in Utah, so when it happened to Clayton, I put it in. There is also the story of one woman he wanted to marry who not only rejected him but eventually rejected the Church; that's also in there. I won't say his story is typical of plural marriages, but it represents, at least to me, the various kinds of experiences that could have occurred, and sometimes did occur, under that system. That's the value of that chapter. Most of Clayton's marriages worked out well. One of his marriages was to the daughter of Amasa Lyman, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. She apparently got on well with Clayton until her father joined the Godbeites, and then she decided to follow her father instead of William Clayton, which was a great heartbreak to him. That story is also in there.

Trepidation? Yes. Just dealing with plural marriage was difficult, especially over thirty years ago when some people were still walking on eggs, so to speak—not wanting to deal with the real issues. Today, however, I don't think there are any problems dealing with them, so long as you deal with them honestly and include the faith and the commitment of the people who were involved, which I tried to do. That's really the story: how much of this represents the faith and the commitment of people like William Clayton as they embraced something entirely different. Does that answer your question?

ALEX: It certainly does. Largely you were able to approach at least the Nauvoo period of that book by having access to those manuscripts. They formed the basis of understanding his life during that time. Do you mind talking for a minute about access to documents—where you think the department has been, and where we are now?

JIM: You asked about access to documents while we were in the Historical Department—that's what you were specifically referring to I think. One of the things that Leonard was able to accomplish was give full access to any documents housed in the Church's archives. That didn't mean that everybody outside our department had full access to them, but those of us who were there could go into the stacks whenever we wanted. One of the things I've kicked myself for is that I didn't take more full advantage of that. I would go in when I was looking for something specific, like William Clayton material. I would just go and look at all the papers that were there, but I didn't expand it to taking a lot of notes on other things I wasn't working on at the time but might be interested in later. Now I wish I had done so. But it was a very healthy time. We were helped out a lot by the Church Archivist, Earl E. Olson, and the librarian, Donald T. Schmidt, who were very cooperative with us in what we

were doing. It is also true that there was a little more opening of the archives even to people outside of the Church.

Unfortunately, some people, not from inside the Historical Department but from outside the department, were able somehow to get access to documents that were restricted, and spirit copies out. That's one of the things that caused the Brethren deep concern about the whole question of access to the archives. There was a time, even before we were in the Historical Department, that you had to get permission—jump through the hoops—to get any kind of access to many documents. I remember one time when I was working on my master's thesis that one of the good brethren working there felt that his job was to examine every note that was taken out of the archives. We had to submit those notes to him and come back the next day, or the next time we were there, to retrieve them. Once in a while we would find a note missing. Unfortunately for him, he didn't realize that some people were making carbon copies of their notes! I very seldom had anything withheld by him, but I do remember one item. I had gotten the same information from some county records down in southern Utah, so I could cite them instead of the Historical Department of the Church. Those restrictions were not a very effective effort on their part. I'm sure the brother saved the Church from embarrassment in some ways, but it wasn't the best way.

Of course, I believe that any private archive has the right to place restrictions on the use of its documents, and if there are restrictions, people should be informed of those restrictions; they should sign an agreement that recognizes those restrictions, and then be trusted. If someone violates that trust, then that person can be restricted from further access. If the archives feel that they would like to approve the use of something from its collection before it's published, they ought to have a good relationship with whoever is doing the research; and the researcher ought to be willing to abide by the requests. If I go to an archive and documents are opened to me, it's still up to the archivists to say how they can be used, and the researcher should respect the policy. So far as what was happening within the Historical Department after we got there, there was no restriction on us. We were cautioned on how we should deal with some of those issues. I myself became involved in a few very sensitive issues. It was the way you dealt with them that was more important, rather than if you had access to the documents or not.

ALEX: Any brief observations on where the Church is now in terms of document access?

JIM: I don't know exactly what the rules are right now, but my impression is that after we left, things became tighter. One of the reasons was that many things were still being cataloged, like the Brigham Young papers. Such things are more and more open to people now. One thing thrilled me when the first

volume of the Joseph Smith Papers came out. I was able to say in my review of the volume that even though there had been stories earlier about the Church not being willing to let people see all the manuscripts, so far as Joseph Smith's history is concerned, we have nothing to hide. The fact that we are being that open and publishing everything is a wonderful thing for the Church and for scholars. I believe it will do more than almost anything else to give confidence to people outside of the Church that we are going to be honest in our approach to Church history. It will also put to rest a lot of rumors, because people think there is lots of damaging stuff hidden in the Joseph Smith papers, and there is not. This is being shown simply by letting the papers be published.

ALEX: Let me follow up the question about document access. Richard L. Jensen mentioned to me—and I don't think he'll mind my using his name—that he has always been impressed by how you were able to deal with sensitive issues, but approach them in a disarming way that would then allow for a conversation about those topics afterwards. Any comments about what kind of philosophical approach you take?

JIM: Well, that was very nice of Richard Jensen, and I'm complimented that people would suggest that, because I'm not sure how well I met that ideal. But it is true that philosophically I have that ideal. This is partly because when I was teaching at BYU, as I mentioned before, I met so many students who were having problems related to Church history. They would get involved in new things in Church history they had never heard about. Sometimes they would read a book that disturbed them and then go to someone in Religion and ask a question. Then they would come to me and report the person from Religion as saying something like, "We have the answer, and you shouldn't be reading that book; we don't talk about this." That kind of thing. I'm sure this didn't happen all the time, but when they did get that kind of answer, where should they go? I remember spending many an hour with students on simply all kinds of questions. One girl came to me very upset because she wanted to publish something about a direct ancestor (her grandmother or great-grandmother) who was a plural wife. She thought the story of that woman ought to be told. People in other areas discouraged her from writing about it—"We should not talk about this." She said to me, in effect, "What can I do? I'm proud of my family, and it seems to me as if I've been made an illegitimate heir or something, and I don't feel illegitimate." I clearly remember the pain she felt at the fact that she was being discouraged from finding out about her ancestor. I could see it in her face and feel it in her voice. I tried to encourage her, and as I remember it, she eventually did the research and wrote the paper.

Philosophically, I think you can write history and tell the whole story, but you also have to be sure that you understand that you're writing about a

real person, and you must make every effort to understand that person's point of view very well. You can talk about William Clayton, and about all of his problems, for example, who he didn't like, and his morose nature, and other things like this, but you wouldn't get the real William Clayton. While you don't ignore those things, you write about them in such a way that they're part of a larger story that includes what he really was—a man of undying faith in the Savior and undying faith in Joseph Smith. What has to come across when you finish is not the little details of this problem and that problem (even though you must deal with those things if they were an important part of his life), but the larger picture. It's possible to tell the truth and not tell the truth at the same time. If you're so focused on some new document that what this document says about something controversial becomes the overall message, you have missed the whole truth, because you have missed the larger context of the document.

I don't know whether that answers your question; my point is that it's a matter of making sure that what you write is responsibly balanced. And before you publish it, you have to let it gel for a while, then go back and read it again several times. Even get some advice from other people. I submitted my articles to other people and took their advice as to "this didn't sound quite right," or whatever. This is a very important thing to do. So I guess that's two things a historian has to learn. One is to take criticism, and the other is to profit from the criticism.

ALEX: We've talked about some of the projects you have researched and on which you've written in the past. Would you talk for a moment about things you would like to see done? Either your work on history of the Church in the twentieth century or things in general in Mormon history you would like to see more emphasis on.

JIM: In a general sense, I would love to see more emphasis on women's history, although I do have a feeling that this can get overpowered. People can spend so much of their lives writing on one topic that they begin to lose perspective on other topics. I'm not accusing the women involved in women's history of doing that, I'm just saying that historians need to strike a good balance. For now, we need more studies of women and women's roles in the Church. We're getting more and more of that all the time. Maybe I'm outdated, but this is what I was saying ten and fifteen years ago, and I still think we need more of that.

Obviously we need more studies of the Church in foreign countries. I would love to see more and more not just on the foundation of the Church but on the kinds of things the Church has to do to get into countries and the degree to which it may be having to adapt programs in certain areas, or the way it

may be challenged culturally by whatever may be happening in other cultures that may or may not conflict with the programs of the Church.

The whole story of technology and what that's done for the Church is a fascinating story. I published a little-read article on that four years ago in the *Deseret News Church Almanac*, and to me it's another of the most fun articles I've published. But it's way out of date now, in just four years. I can't even believe it was fully up to date then. Just keeping up with that kind of thing is important. Right now I'm still trying to find time to finish that work on the history of the Church in the last half of the twentieth century, which you worked on for me. I have all those notes upstairs.

I've been delayed on so many other things that I've just never been able to do more than put an outline on paper, but I hope I get to finish that one of these days because to me it is a very important project. Some wonderful things can be said about it. Oh, there are lots of things that should be done.

ALEX: Have you any anecdotes you'd like to share about your work in Church history and the men and women you've worked with.

JIM: I was a real admirer of Leonard Arrington. As you know, I felt very close to Leonard. I was much impressed by how careful he was to keep a diary. His diaries are now accessible at Utah State University, but I haven't gone through them yet. He dictated his diary every day to his secretary. I remember time after time someone would come into the office, someone who was important in one way or another or someone who was just interesting in one way or another, to have a conversation with Leonard, and Leonard would immediately dictate it to his secretary. I never did that. I tried to remember later on and maybe say a word about it in my own journal, but he dictated the details. Someday that's going to be a tremendously valuable resource. Leonard the "dictator," in the positive sense of the word, is something I remember.

I also remember—and this comes back to the question of faith and history—a young man with his fiancée and his future mother-in-law. I suppose he married the girl (I don't know for sure), but he *wanted* to marry her. He was having trouble with his faith, partly because of having read a lot of anti-Mormon material. That is part of the problem we have in the Church. Many people get hold of anti-Mormon material that reveals things we have never talked about in the Church, and therefore have not discussed them within the context of faith. He said, "I've come to talk to you, and I'm going to talk to Leonard Arrington [which he did], and I'm going to go down to BYU and talk with some other people there." (I don't remember who those others were.) He said he had a lot of questions, and they were very intellectual questions. He sat in my office and asked his questions. I started to try to answer in a balanced way, saying, "Yes, this or that happened, but you also have to remember this." But at that point his prospective mother-in-law stopped me and said, "Brother

Allen, I have no idea what you people are talking about! I'm going to leave, but please save my daughter!" That stunned me! I still remember those exact words. But I didn't know how to do what she was asking me to do. The girl and the boy stayed in my office for quite a while, and we talked about many of the things you and I have talked about today. I had to try to convince him that the Church has never said that everything that comes across the pulpit is final doctrine. The Church has never said that everything works perfectly. "The Church has never said we've never made a mistake. The Church has never said some of these things. You have gotten some misimpressions partly by reading incomplete Church histories and partly by reading anti-Mormon material that does not tell the whole story." I then tried to fill in some things where I thought his knowledge was incomplete, and also let him know that I really believed, and why. That's the kind of balance I tried to create for him. Then he said he was going to talk to Leonard Arrington, but I don't know what Leonard said. That's an extreme case, but similar things would happen in that office all the time as people came in to talk.

You may not want to put this in but I remember a different kind of story, a very satisfying story. I was sitting in the office one day in Salt Lake City when here came in a big, good-looking guy dressed in a marine officer's uniform. He was a lieutenant colonel, just retiring from the U. S. Marine Corps. He said, "Do you remember me?" I didn't right then, but once he mentioned who he was, I remembered way back to the first year I taught seminary, in Kaysville. His mother was a widow, and somehow I had befriended him and invited him to go hunting with me one day. I had never really gone hunting on my own, but I had my dad's rifle, so I thought I would go hunting. I invited him to go along. We went out on the hills somewhere, sat on the side of a hill, but never saw a deer. We just sat talking about the gospel and about other things. He came back all those years later and said, "You know, that day on the hillside hunting with you had a tremendous effect on my life, and I want to thank you for it." Somehow I think that the role of scholars and teachers in Church schools is to take an interest in students and spend time with them.

While his story is different from that of the young man with his fiancée who walked into the office, I always felt that I might have helped someone along the way. I don't know if I was always successful at it. I know a lot of other people who have stories about converting people, and I don't have those kinds of stories, but I felt the responsibility of being open to talk with students. I always felt that my major role at BYU was to be there for students. Perhaps I have digressed from where you wanted me to go. I'm trying to think of more anecdotes.

I was happily satisfied when we first were appointed to the Historical Department. When David Bitton came back from his interview, Leonard called

Davis and me into his office. Dean Jesse was also there. I wondered in my own mind, *Are we going to start this adventure with prayer?* and Leonard said, “We need to start with prayer.” The group of us knelt down and had kind of an opening prayer for the whole experience in the Historical Department. Just being there and seeing Leonard in that kind of situation, which a lot of people would never see him in because they see him as the scholar and the controversial man, was a great experience. Having that kind of experience was a wonderful start to our whole experience in the Historical Department.

ALEX: You said something earlier about when and why you left the Church’s Historical Department. Could you briefly say something about what happened in your career after that?

JIM: As I said earlier, I went back to the BYU Department of History on a full-time basis in 1979, after a little over seven years as Assistant Church Historian. I could see the “handwriting on the wall,” so to speak, so when the dean of the college encouraged me to return, I gladly did so. In 1980 I was named chair of the department, a position I held for six years. Then in 1987, I felt deeply honored to be named Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr., Professor of Western American History. I held that academic chair for five years, until my retirement in 1992. The Department of History allowed me to maintain an office in the department for the next two years. Then in 1994, I was “adopted,” in a manner of speaking, by the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for LDS History. I held the title of “senior research associate” until 2005, when the institute was disbanded and its staff transferred back to the Historical Department of the Church. During that time I took a leave of absence in order for my wife and me to fulfill a mission for the Church. We served as CES missionaries at the Boston Institute of Religion, 1999–2000. I also taught for one semester at BYU-Hawaii (January–April 2002).



ALEX: What research projects did you complete during that time?

Jim and Renée just prior to being called as CES missionaries at the Boston Institute of Religion where they served from 1999 to 2000.

Jim and Renée have served as officiators in the Timpanogos Temple since 2004.



JIM: I completed a few small projects as well as three major projects. One was the biography of William Clayton, which had been well along the way before I left the Historical Department of the Church and which was finally published in 1987 by the University of Illinois Press: *Trials of Discipleship: The Story of William Clayton, A Mormon*. In 1986, while still in manuscript form, it won the annual David Woolley Evans and Beatrice Cannon Evans Biography Award. In 2002 it was republished by BYU Press under the title *No Toil Nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton*. In 1992, I published another book that got its start while I was in Church Historical Department: *Men With a Mission: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles 1837–1840*, published by Deseret Book. It was reprinted last year. Co-authors on that book were Ronald K. Esplin and David J. Whittaker. But the project I spent the most time on during that period was a massive bibliography, published by the University of Illinois Press in 2000 as *Studies in Mormon History, 1830–1997: An Indexed Bibliography*. Ronald W. Walker and David J. Whittaker are listed a co-authors, but as they will both tell you, the overwhelming amount of work on that project was mine. The publication consisted of two parts. The first was a comprehensive listing of all the books, articles, theses, and dissertations relating to Mormon history from 1830 to 1997 (or at least all we could find). The second section, the heart of the project, was a comprehensive topical index to these historical writings. Also bound in the volume was a “Topical Guide to Published Social Science Literature on the Mormons,” prepared by Armand L. Mauss and Dynette Ivie Reynolds. I worked on that project for



James B. Allen receiving the Leonard J. Arrington award from the Mormon History Association presented by Armand J. Mauss, May 23, 2008.

about twenty years before it was published. I received several research grants from BYU to support it, and employed numerous research assistants to search for materials, summarize them, and help prepare indexes. The book won a special citation from the Mormon History Association in 2001. I continued to update the database for several years, working with Michael Hunter of the BYU library. Hunter continues to work on it, and the database, including continuing updates. It's now searchable online at [mormonhistory.byu.edu](http://mormonhistory.byu.edu). Not enough people are aware of this project, but making such a database available to serious students of Mormon history was an important goal for me, and I am very gratified that it is still going on.

By the way, the collaboration between Ronald Walker, David Whittaker and myself resulted in another book, *Mormon History*, published by the University of Illinois press in 2001. It was a comprehensive study of Mormon historiography—the history of Mormon historical writing.

Well, you asked me to be brief, so I had better stop.

ALEX: Thank you.

JIM: It has been a pleasure.