

Coming to Terms with Mormon History: An Interview with Leonard Arrington

DIALOGUE: Leonard, would you tell us something of your family background and childhood, please?

Arrington: I grew up on a farm in Twin Falls County, Idaho. My father served on the high council of Twin Falls stake when I was a child and youth. In 1924, when I was seven, he was called on a two-year, full-time mission to the Southern States. He left behind my mother and four children (I was the second son). We rented our twenty-acre farm to a neighbor and moved to a small frame house near my grandparents and two uncles on the south side of Twin Falls. Five months after my father left, my mother gave birth to a fifth child. When Dad returned he resumed farming, and I was happy to work closely with him because I was interested in animals and poultry just as he was. With his encouragement I became a teamster on the farm and also initiated a poultry enterprise that I continued until I went to college.

DIALOGUE: What sparked your interest in Mormon history?

Arrington: I was first introduced to Mormon history in 1929 when I was twelve years old. Our Twin Falls ward started a junior genealogical society in lieu of our regular Sunday School class, and I became fascinated with family history and genealogy. For this class I wrote an eleven-page autobiography and histories of both my father's and my mother's families. I completed pedigree charts and family group sheets, corresponded with my mother's oldest sister to get the history of their family, recorded a number of faith-promoting incidents, and gave several talks about our family history projects in Sunday School. Unfortunately, the program in our ward was dropped after one year because instructions from Salt Lake City discouraged wards from adopting

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any programs that had not been cleared with Church headquarters. All of the local leaders wept but dutifully discontinued the program. However, my interest in family and Church history had been ignited.

When I was fifteen, a neighbor gave me a book that had just come out — *Joseph Smith, An American Prophet* by John Henry Evans. I read it, enjoyed it very much, and got a new appreciation for the Prophet and for Church history.

DIALOGUE: How was your interest in Mormon history heightened as a college student?

Arrington: When I went to the University of Idaho (1935), we were fortunate to have George Tanner, in my judgment the finest institute teacher in the Church. A graduate of the University of Chicago, he was very interested in LDS history as well as Christian history and, under his direction, our Sunday School class studied the *Comprehensive History of the Church* by B. H. Roberts. During the four years I was at the University of Idaho, we went through all six volumes. Brother Tanner also taught classes in Church history, Old and New Testaments, Book of Mormon, and comparative religions, so I had splendid university-level training in LDS history and doctrine. He welcomed questions and helped me to reconcile what I was learning in my science classes with the gospel.

DIALOGUE: What about your doctoral training in graduate school?

Arrington: In 1939 I went to the University of North Carolina to do graduate work in economics. I devoted my entire first year there to reading economics journals and books and attending lectures. I was the only Mormon attending the university, and the only Mormon in Chapel Hill. In January 1941, I went to North Carolina State College (now North Carolina State University) in Raleigh to teach, take classes in agricultural economics and rural sociology, and earn credit toward the doctorate. In reading for a rural sociology seminar, I found references to works on the Mormon village by Lowry Nelson, T. Lynn Smith, and other scholars. Indeed, I was delighted to learn of a professional literature on the Latter-day Saints and their social system. Fascinated, I read everything I could find on Mormon economics and sociology in the libraries at State College and at the University of North Carolina. In the process, I discovered articles by Bernard DeVoto and Juanita Brooks as well as by Lowry Nelson and other academicians. These stimulated me to write some papers on Mormonism for my graduate seminars.

DIALOGUE: Were your studies interrupted by World War II?

Arrington: In 1943, I went as a soldier to North Africa for sixteen months and then to Italy for fifteen months. My experience, particularly in Italy, was a “building” one. Although I was a “simple soldier,” I was given responsibilities in the economic section of the Allied Commission for Italy. As an

Allied coordinator with the Italian Central Institute of Statistics in Rome and with the Office of Price Control for Northern Italy, I had experiences in economic investigation and reporting and in personnel administration, management, and decision-making that proved to be invaluable in my subsequent career as a teacher and administrator. I learned much about Italy, Europe, and human nature.

During my last year in Italy (1945), I thought a great deal about what I wanted to do for a doctoral dissertation and decided to propose to my committee a topic related to the economics of Mormonism. I wrote to John A. Widtsoe, who had been president of both the University of Utah and Utah State Agricultural College — now Utah State University (USU) — and who was then an apostle, asking him if the Church would grant me access to materials to do such a dissertation. His reply was friendly and encouraging. He suggested I talk with him whenever I got to Salt Lake City.

I was discharged from the army in January 1946 and resumed teaching at North Carolina State College. Although they offered me a permanent position, I wanted to get to the West. So I applied for positions at western universities. I was glad when the finest offer came from Utah State Agricultural College in Logan. My wife, Grace Fort Arrington, and I arrived there in July 1946, and I began traveling to Salt Lake City each week to do research in the Church Archives.

Dr. Widtsoe's counsel to me was, "They're very hesitant about sharing the abundant resources they have, Brother Arrington, so you must build up their confidence by beginning to use printed material, then asking for theses and dissertations, then the Journal History, and eventually you'll be able to see anything because you will have built up their confidence." He used the image of a camel that inches through the tent and eventually carries away the tent on his back.

DIALOGUE: Did you take his advice, and were you allowed unlimited access?

Arrington: Obediently, I conformed to the policy suggested by Dr. Widtsoe, and during the years that followed I was never denied access to anything in the Archives. Having located an enormous amount of material, I was able to report to my committee that I would write on Mormon economic policies, 1847 to 1900. I worked at the Archives for four summers, 1946 to 1949.

Grace and I and our first child, James, then returned to the University of North Carolina (UNC) for the 1949–50 academic year to finish all the course work I needed for the Ph.D. Since I had taught many different economics courses at Utah State, my graduate work at UNC was not difficult, and I spent much of the year putting together my research notes and writing drafts of articles for publication in journals. When I admitted this to one of my advisors, he tried hard to discourage me, but I felt very confident and went ahead working on these papers. I did well in my courses, passed the orals with an "excellent," scored well on the written examinations, and passed the required examinations in two languages — French and Italian.

By the time I resumed teaching at Utah State in the fall of 1950 I had the drafts of several professional articles, but I hesitated to submit them. Once when Bill Mulder, the editor of the *Western Humanities Review*, was visiting with us while in Logan for a lecture, I showed him two articles I had written. He was enthusiastic about both and published one in the next *Review* issue and the other in 1951. In the meantime I published articles in the *Journal of Economic History*, *Rural Sociology*, and *Pacific Historical Review*. Within twelve months after my year at the University of North Carolina I had published seven articles in professional journals. These launched my writing "career."

I took leave without pay from Utah State from January to June 1952 to finish up my dissertation and final orals.

DIALOGUE: Were all those articles basically out of your dissertation?

Arrington: I think that three appeared in somewhat different form in the dissertation. My major professor and principal advisor, Milton Heath, thought I should publish a book on the economic activities of the Latter-day Saints, not necessarily the dissertation but something that would be a comprehensive treatment of the Mormon economy, 1847 to 1900. He arranged for me to receive a grant from the Committee on Research in Economic History, so I could finish a book. By the summer of 1954 I had finished an 800-page, book-length manuscript entitled, "Building the Kingdom: The Economic Activities of the Latter-day Saints, 1847-1900." Some top economic historians read the manuscript and wrote detailed criticisms and comments, and I worked those over for a year.

I was almost ready in 1955 to send the revised manuscript to the Committee of Economic Historians for publication when I realized that it really had no focus, chronological or otherwise. Filled with detail, it was tedious, uninteresting. My good friend George Ellsworth, who is a brilliant, trained historian, declared, "This is a comprehensive treatise out of which a fine book can be written."

It dawned on me that I would have to quit thinking of myself as an economist writing an economics book. I must try to tell a fascinating story of a fascinating people as a good historian would. I managed to get a six-month fellowship to the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California, and a six-month teaching fellowship to Yale University. Utah State granted me a sabbatical leave, and I was off.

On my first day at Huntington I started work on what became *Great Basin Kingdom*. The Huntington staff was impressed with what I was doing and urged me to remain for the entire year. During my thirteen months at the Huntington, I wrote an average of a chapter a month and finished *Great Basin Kingdom*. I sent copies of my chapters to George Ellsworth, and he generously sent back criticisms and comments. He noted with some surprise, "This is more history than economics, and I hope that doesn't disturb you." He was right. I began to see myself as a historian and began subscribing to historical journals

and attending historical conventions. My wartime experiences in North Africa and Italy no doubt gave me insights that were helpful in understanding the Mormon economy "under siege" in pioneer Utah. Under the sponsorship of the Committee for Economic Historians, *Great Basin Kingdom* was published in 1958 by Harvard University Press.

DIALOGUE: What hastened your leap into western history?

Arrington: I continued to teach a wide variety of economics classes, but a shift in emphasis in economics propelled me toward history. Economists had become fascinated with econometrics, statistics, and mathematical equations. One could hardly publish in economic journals without using algebra, geometry, calculus, and advanced statistics. Although I had some understanding of these and did publish three articles of this type, they were not my forte. My work was descriptive economic history and theory; I began submitting articles to historical journals, and they were readily accepted.

In 1958 and 1959 I served as Fulbright Professor of American Economics at the University of Genoa in Italy, taking leave from Utah State without pay. It was an enjoyable experience for me and my family. I lectured in Italian on the American economy to students at several Italian universities and to community cultural groups. Some of these lectures were published in Italian newspapers and journals of commentary.

After we returned to Logan, I continued to do research, mostly on aspects of Mormon and western American economic activity. In 1966 I took another sabbatical to lecture on western American history at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), substituting for John Caughey, who was on sabbatical leave.

DIALOGUE: Leonard, after your return from Italy, you did some intensive studies of businesses and industries in Utah and the West. You seemed to be moving out of Mormon history. What was the reason for the change?

Arrington: I did several things in the early 1960s that were related to Mormon, Utah, and western United States economics. I suppose that I felt the need to demonstrate to my department that I could contribute as an economist. The Utah State University Research Council generously granted me funds to employ a secretary part-time, covered part of my travel expenses, and allowed me some leave time to work on books. I did a book on the beet sugar industry, a biography of David Eccles as a western industrialist, a series on Utah's defense industry for the state planning department, another series for the *Utah Historical Quarterly* on Utah defense installations, and a series on reclamation projects in Utah. I wrote an article on the Civil War income tax and its impact on Utah and a series of articles on the economic base of the Wasatch Front. After returning from UCLA, I continued to work on books and articles about western American history and Utah economic history.

DIALOGUE: You have helped found journals and organizations and have fostered and aided young historians. Why did you feel these journals and organizations were needed, and why did you encourage young scholars? What was your role in establishing DIALOGUE, the *Western Historical Quarterly*, and later the *Journal of Mormon History*, which served as outlets for scholarly publication for both Mormon and western historians?

Arrington: When George Ellsworth came to Utah State in 1950, having just finished a Ph.D. at the University of California at Berkeley and beginning his brilliant lifelong teaching career at USU, I was very excited to see him. I knew he was very bright and a kindred soul. In 1951 Eugene Campbell came to Logan to direct the LDS Institute of Religion, after just finishing his doctoral dissertation at the University of Southern California. He was another kindred soul. Also at USU was Wendell Rich, who had been acting director of the Institute and was also interested in Mormon history.

We and our wives met at each of our homes, in rotation, once a month to read papers we were planning to submit for publication. In this way we heard chapters from all our dissertations and other research projects.

We met for at least three years, and the experience was extremely valuable for me. I learned how to do Mormon history! I learned how to do footnotes. I felt so strongly about my need to do something well that I took two seminars from George Ellsworth and wrote papers for the seminars, not for credit but because I wanted to learn. George taught me the sources and literature of Mormon history.

These "cottage meetings" were so profitable for us that we used every opportunity to bring in other scholars. We invited to our meetings every historical scholar and social scientist who happened to come to Logan, including Thomas F. O'Dea, Mario DePillis, Gustive Larson, Lowry Nelson, Juanita Brooks, T. Edgar Lyon, Richard Poll, David Miller, James Allen, Davis Bitton, and many others. They stimulated us, and maybe we stimulated them, too. At any rate, we developed a circle of people who were interested in Mormon studies and who were acquainted with each other. When we went to professional conventions, we all got together and drank milkshakes and talked. That went on for years.

Finally we decided that we needed a formal organization. When the Utah Conference on Higher Education met in Logan in 1965, we had a little rump session to discuss forming a society. Fourteen of us were present — some from BYU, some from the University of Utah (U of U), and some from USU. We decided to organize the Mormon History Association (MHA) in December during the American and Pacific Historical Associations' meetings in San Francisco. We wrote to all the interested persons we could think of telling them what we were going to do and inviting them to the meeting. Sixty or seventy people attended.

During that same year, I happened to sit next to Gene England on a plane. He told me he and a group at Stanford were planning to found DIALOGUE. (I didn't originally like the name "Dialogue," I'll confess.) Our MHA group

was looking forward to founding our own journal, but Gene tried to talk me out of it, saying that the DIALOGUE group would make all sorts of concessions in order to publish historians' work if the MHA wouldn't publish its journal.

When we brought the matter up in our December 1965 MHA meeting, Wesley Johnson represented DIALOGUE very well, and the group voted to give their loyalty to DIALOGUE — I think, unanimously. The next year the first issue of DIALOGUE came out, and I was thrilled, excited, pleased, and satisfied. I thought it was just wonderful. Historians have been supporting DIALOGUE ever since.

In 1974, at the suggestion of James Allen, Davis Bitton, and others, we established the annual *Journal of Mormon History*, which is a wonderful outlet for many of our best scholarly articles.

DIALOGUE: Please discuss how you have used other scholars' talents in your work.

Arrington: I had one advantage that not everybody had. Grants from the Utah State University Research Council enabled me to employ economics students and others on several research projects. Among the budding economists and historians who worked with me on these projects were Gary Hansen, Thomas Alexander, Richard Bennett, Wayne Hinton, Jon Haupt, Tony Cluff, Gwynn Barrett, Richard Jensen, and Mike Quinn. Given this start, these students have gotten advanced degrees and written praiseworthy books and articles. The projects were very fruitful for them and for me.

DIALOGUE: How did you get scholars from the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints involved with you?

Arrington: We continued our milkshake sessions at national historical conventions, bringing in not only LDS but RLDS people, originally through the graciousness of Bob Flanders, then a professor of history at Graceland College, who had completed a splendid dissertation on Nauvoo for the University of Wisconsin in 1964. We got acquainted with RLDS historians, they became acquainted with our people, and when they came to Logan and Salt Lake City and BYU they stayed with us and when we went back to Iowa and Missouri we stayed with them. These friendships with such historians as Richard Howard, Paul Edwards, Alma Blair, Bill Russell, and others have been warm and enduring.

DIALOGUE: Would you please describe your return to Mormon history?

Arrington: When I was at UCLA, Alfred Knopf, the New York publisher, wrote asking me to do a book on the Mormon frontier. Nothing really good had been done on that, he said, and he thought I was the right man to do it. I wrote to the First Presidency of the Church, telling them about this invitation and saying I would need full access to the material in the Church Archives.

Late one Friday afternoon I happened to be in my office at UCLA when President Nathan Eldon Tanner called to advise me that the First Presidency had reviewed my letter. "You will be getting a letter soon giving you permission to have full access to the material in the Church Archives to do this book," he promised. This gave me hope that something really good could be done in Church history.

After I returned to Utah, I spent all my available time in the Church Archives in Salt Lake City. I would drive down from Logan one or two days each week or in the summer spend several weeks at a time working on this book.

DIALOGUE: Again, did you have open access?

Arrington: Yes, and having unrestricted access to all the material helped me to realize how difficult writing such a history would be. So much of the story — and it was a *great* story — had never been examined.

I fussed around writing and doing articles and giving papers until 1972, when I received another call from President Tanner, "Brother Arrington, I would like to talk to you at your first convenience." I went down the next morning. That's when he asked me to be Church Historian. He wanted me to begin the work immediately, so I arranged with my department head to allow me to go to Salt Lake City on days when I didn't have classes. In June 1972 I officially resigned from Utah State University.

DIALOGUE: Bill Mulder, George Ellsworth, Eugene Campbell, and others were very open in helping you. You responded by helping others. Is that the kind of philosophy you took with you to the Church Historian's Office?

Arrington: I took that philosophy, yes. I personally shared notes with a lot of people, and a lot of articles that have been published were based, at least partly, on material in my files, sometimes with attribution and sometimes without, just as I've drawn from the work of other people for some of my publications. Of course, I have tried to give full credit to those who helped me. Sharing materials is important in Mormon history because the materials aren't always available to everybody. People who use the National Archives may not feel any obligation to share material with other people, but those who use LDS material feel a compulsion to share.

By becoming active in professional associations, I eventually became an officer of several historical societies, hoping that this would help the cause of Mormon history, that it would give a new respect, intellectual respect, to Mormon scholarship (I'm not speaking of myself personally but only of the field), and that Mormon articles, articles dealing with aspects of Mormon history, would come to be more readily placed in national, regional, and local historical journals and encyclopedias.

DIALOGUE: If you look at *Great Basin Kingdom* as one bookend and *Brigham Young: American Moses* as the other bookend, and everything else you've done in between, how do you describe your maturation process as a scholar?

Arrington: I have done many kinds of work. First, I've done studies of Utah economic institutions, such as the pioneer monetary system, banks, beet sugar companies, reclamation projects, missile plants, and so on.

Second, I've done studies of pioneer women. I became fascinated with the activities of women when I was working on my dissertation. I did a paper on the economic role of Mormon women in 1951, long before women's studies were of general interest. Recognizing the importance of Latter-day Saint women's history, in 1972 we hired Maureen Ursenbach Beecher to begin work with the Historical Department of the Church on that phase of our history, and she was later joined by Carol Cornwall Madsen and Jill Mulvay Derr. We also encouraged and assisted a group of LDS women in the Boston area, who produced *Mormon Sisters: Women in Early Utah*; and another group who, under the editorship of Vicky Burgess-Olson, published *Sister Saints*. We now have some marvelous biographies, histories, and commentaries on Mormon women's history, but more needs to be done.

I try to do my share. My daughter Susan A. Madsen and I wrote *Sunbonnet Sisters* and *Mothers of the Prophets*, and I've published various other essays on aspects of women's history in books and journals. My second wife, Harriet Horne Arrington, and I just wrote a chapter in a new book, *A Heritage of Faith*, published by Deseret Book. We're continuing to work together on women's studies, preparing papers and articles, and hope eventually to do a book on Harriet's grandmother, Alice Merrill Horne, and great-grandmother, Bathsheba W. Smith.

Third, I've done some biographies. Biographies are a different art form, a different kind of historical scholarship. It never occurred to me to do a biography until a prominent Hollywood attorney, Roland Rich Woolley, asked me if I would, as a favor, review a biography of his wife's father, Governor William Spry, written by William Roper. I thought the manuscript needed some additional work and wrote to Mr. Woolley that I would be glad to furnish material from the Church Archives to Mr. Roper. Mr. Woolley replied: "I've talked with Mr. Roper, and we've agreed that we would like you to be a collaborator on the book and do the chapters that you can do that are necessary." I agreed, and Mr. Woolley made a grant to Utah State University to pay for my time and expenses. Utah State University was glad to have a grant because they took 25 percent of it for overhead. So I didn't get paid anything extra, I just did it as part of my job.

When we finished the Spry biography, Mr. Woolley proposed that I do a biography of his grandfather, Charles C. Rich, cofounder of the Mormon colony in San Bernardino, founder of the settlements in Bear Lake Valley, an apostle, and for many years general of the Mormon military forces. Mr. Woolley made another grant to Utah State University, and I enlisted the part-time help of Ross Peterson, Richard Jensen, and JoAnn Woodruff, my secretary. Again, I wasn't paid anything extra for it; I just did it as part of my university assignment.

I still did not feel that I had done a proper biography (the Charles Rich book was more a history than a biography). Then Noni Eccles (Nora Eccles

Harrison) asked me to do a biography of her father, David Eccles. She arranged a substantial grant to Utah State University to pay expenses, including part of my salary. I employed some students, particularly George Daines, to help me track down the many enterprises of David Eccles. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher helped me style the manuscript into a proper biography, and it was finally published by Utah State University Press in 1974.

In the process of doing that book I learned more about the art of biography. When Mr. Woolley came to me again and asked me to do a biography of his other grandfather, Edwin D. Woolley, I was ready. I thought I could do it — that is, with help. He made a grant, and I employed Becky Cornwall (now Rebecca Cornwall Bartholomew) as research assistant. She was marvelous. She has the skills of a novelist, and she helped shape the narrative into a really fine product. I sincerely regret that I could not persuade Mr. Woolley to list her as a collaborator.

When I was an advisory editor of *DIALOGUE* in 1966, Gene England and Wes Johnson asked me to edit a special Mormon history issue. I included in that issue an article entitled “Why a Biography of Brigham Young Will Never Be Written,” by Philip Taylor, a non-Mormon Englishman who had written some fine articles on Mormon history. Then, during the year I was at UCLA, that terrible biography of Brigham Young (*Lion of the Lord*) by Stanley Hirshson came out. Imagine . . . he got a Guggenheim to do that biography! It’s not based on sources in the Church Archives but primarily on articles published in New York newspapers of the time. Imagine writing a biography of Robert E. Lee based on what was reported in New York newspapers — or of Jefferson Davis or Queen Victoria!

DIALOGUE: Did Hirshson try to get access to Church Archives?

Arrington: He came to Salt Lake City and talked with A. William Lund, assistant Church historian, who tried to discourage him but did provide him with a list of things he could see that would have greatly enriched his book and given it credibility. Hirshson chose, instead, to return to New York and work primarily in the New York Public Library. Perhaps that was his intention all along — to be turned down so he could go back to New York and write the book there. Because he was not given blanket access, he chose not to make use of the many sources that might have been available to him.

I wrote a review of *Lion of the Lord* in *BYU Studies* (Winter 1970) in which I listed all the Brigham Young materials in the Church Archives, none of which he had used. (Of course, he would not have had access to all of them.) That made me think about doing a biography of Brigham Young myself. I wrote several articles using the available Brigham Young material. I hoped someone else, someone more qualified than I, would do a biography. After I became Church Historian, I finally induced Jack Adamson to agree to undertake a Brigham Young biography after he had finished his biography of Chief Joseph. Mormon biography suffered a serious loss when Jack died unexpectedly in 1975, before he was ready to start on Brother Brigham.

Who else could do it? We in the Church Historical Department decided to make a catalogue of all the Brigham Young materials, a task that took several years. The list was seventy-seven pages long.

When we had finished the catalogue in 1977, we went to President Spencer W. Kimball and explained the need for a good biography of Brigham Young. We proposed seven volumes, each focusing on one of Brigham Young's roles: colonizer, family man, businessman, Church president, governor, formulator of Indian policy, and contributor to Mormon doctrine and practice. President Kimball listened to us carefully, thought for a moment, then finally shook his head and said, "I would like to see a really good, one-volume biography of Brigham Young before I die." Of course, we were willing to do that.

"Here are the names of three people that we suggest as possible biographers," we volunteered. He replied, "I don't want to see the list. I want you to do it," nodding his head toward me. He had liked my biography of Edwin D. Woolley, his grandfather, which Camilla had read to him. Sister Kimball told me he'd chuckle every so often and say, "That sure is a good book, isn't it?" I suspect that because he liked the Woolley biography, he thought I could do justice to Brigham Young. That may be how I ended up with the assignment.

President Kimball recommended finding a national publisher, wanted the book written in a manner that would make it imperative for libraries to place it on their shelves, and specifically instructed me to consult with a variety of historians, both members and nonmembers, "liberals" and the more orthodox. Recognizing the enormous mass of Brigham Young manuscripts that had never been examined by any historian, President Kimball thought we had a marvelous opportunity to present "Brother Brigham" as he was, in his greatness as a prophet and as a human being.

Shortly after that meeting our group of historians was transferred from the Church Historical Department to BYU. The Brigham Young biography would have to be a private project, not a Historical Department enterprise. I borrowed some money and hired four persons to help go through the mass of formerly unexplored material.

DIALOGUE: Did you still have access to the resources in the Church Archives after you had gone to BYU?

Arrington: I did, and of course, President Kimball had approved the project, so everything was available to me and the researchers who were working with me.

After we had gotten a good start, my son Carl said, "Dad, you're absolutely crazy. The publisher will give you an advance on royalties to cover your expenses." Well, I wrote to Alfred Knopf, who had agreed to publish the book, and they agreed to pay me some advance royalty so I could repay the loan I had contracted to pay for the help. Carl said, "Don't you realize, Dad, that if they give you an advance, they'll try harder to sell the book?" He was pretty persuasive.

DIALOGUE: That's a different experience for a historian, to get advance royalties.

Arrington: *Brigham Young: American Moses* came out in 1985, and it received good national reviews, was adopted by the History Book Club, and was nominated by the National Book Critics Circle as biography of the year. It didn't win the top award, but I felt that Brigham Young had finally come into his own. He was finally recognized as a prominent national leader. I was especially glad when Sister Kimball told me that President Kimball was pleased by the book and by its national reception.

DIALOGUE: Leonard, when you were employed as Church Historian did you ever feel a conflict between loyalty to the Church and loyalty to your profession?

Arrington: That's a very good question, and I am glad to respond. I was called to be Church Historian by the First Presidency. They often expressed to me their complete support and confidence in me. I had several conferences with them, and every time they concluded by saying, "Brother Arrington, we feel sure the Lord wants you in what you're doing, and we encourage you in your work." President N. Eldon Tanner and President Harold B. Lee were both very supportive, and when we had our first conference with President Kimball, he also reassured us and remained friendly, supportive, and helpful. I had reason to feel that we had their backing.

I kept hearing rumors that one or two of the Brethren were less than enthusiastic about some of the things we were doing, but I realized that one cannot please everybody. There are always people who find something to question, something to complain about. I knew that one of the Brethren, in particular, looked dimly upon some of the things we were publishing. He objected to two things. First, he felt that we tried to provide a secular rationale for activities and decisions that, in his mind, came straight from heaven. Second, he thought that Church officials should always be presented in a completely positive light — that they should never be presented in a manner that would suggest they had made a mistake or had human weaknesses.

DIALOGUE: Did his feeling apply to Church leaders of historical as well as contemporary times?

Arrington: Yes, but that didn't concern me because I had the prophet's reassurances. I felt that for our work to have national and Churchwide credibility, especially among informed people, we had to do it the right way. I felt we had good, continuing support.

I interpreted our move to BYU as a way to preserve our scholarly integrity. As several persons told us, the Church didn't want to be in the position of "approving" or "disapproving" what we wrote. Under university administration, we could continue our scholarly work in an atmosphere of academic freedom. I feel sure that we exercised it responsibly.

Any historian would acknowledge an inevitable tension between true professionalism and faith in a church, its leaders, its doctrines, and practices. When is it proper to leave out information that is private and personal — confidential? The answer is important not only in religious history but in business, diplomatic, and family history. For example, Fawn Brodie wrote a biography of Thomas Jefferson. She felt that there was more to his relationship with his woman servant than other historians had ever acknowledged. When she published these speculations, Jefferson historians were angry with her. In their view she had made more of that relationship than was really the case. She was guilty of sensationalizing. Maybe she was and maybe she wasn't. Every biographer faces that problem. Suppose you're doing the biography of someone you begin to suspect was homosexual. You can't prove it. You don't know it for sure, but you have found some indications. Do you mention your suspicions? How much do you make of them? Everyone who writes history feels conflicts about what is relevant, responsible, and essential.

DIALOGUE: Now, Leonard, let us get down to another professional question. Who takes your place? Who will help sponsor and groom scholars in Mormon history? State universities are reluctant to employ dedicated Mormon historians, and institutionalizing scholarship in one location like BYU is dangerous. What future do you see for people researching and writing Mormon history?

Arrington: Several people continue to encourage Mormon history. One of them is Davis Bitton at the University of Utah, a great historian in modern European history as well as LDS history. Another at the University of Utah is Dean May, who is doing a marvelous job and now has tenure. I'm sure his department is glad to have him. At BYU, Jim Allen and Tom Alexander are energetically pushing good scholarship in Mormon history. At USU, now that Chas. Peterson is about to retire, I'm sure Ross Peterson and the replacement for Chas. will ensure a continuation of good scholarship. There are others, some key persons in other colleges and universities and libraries: Richard Bushman at Columbia University, Howard Lamar at Yale, Stan Kimball at Southern Illinois, Jan Shipps at Indiana, Richard Bennett in Manitoba, Dave Whittaker at BYU, and Grant Underwood and Guy Bishop in Southern California.

I have no fear about the future of Mormon studies. The Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History continues to make important contributions as do many trained scholars at Ricks, BYU-Hawaii, and elsewhere. My colleagues in the Institute — Dean Jessee, Ron Walker, Maureen Beecher, Ron Esplin, Bill Hartley, Carol Madsen, Richard Jensen, Jill Derr — all are productive and careful scholars.

DIALOGUE: What are some of the unplowed fields that Mormon scholars should farm?

Arrington: More needs to be done on twentieth-century Mormon experience. Scholars continue to replot the nineteenth century, and contributions can still be made; but more attention needs to be paid to the twentieth century.

We need to continue to do more in women's studies. I'm trying to do some, and we have Carol Cornwall Madsen, Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, and Jill Mulvay Derr working in this field. They are splendid, industrious historians.

Much needs to be done on Mormonism outside the United States. We're in the process of organizing a Canadian Mormon Studies Association, and we hope we encouraged British and European scholars when we had our Mormon History Association meeting at Oxford in 1987. I understand also that scholars in Australia and New Zealand are now planning an annual get-together.

DIALOGUE: Do you think it would be possible for someone to write an economic history of the Church in the twentieth century as you did of the nineteenth century?

Arrington: Yes, I think it could be done. We could do something much better than *Mormon Corporate Empire*, but no work would have quite the unity of *Great Basin Kingdom* because the nineteenth-century world is so different from the twentieth-century world.

Another good field of study is Latter-day Saint Spanish-Americans, Hispanics, and Mexicans, various Indian nations, Japanese-Americans, Chinese-Americans, and so on.

DIALOGUE: Is it possible to study long-controversial issues of congregations that are segregated by race and language?

Arrington: Yes. Should we have German-speaking wards, Dutch-speaking wards, Korean-speaking wards, and so on? When we moved to Logan in 1946, a German-speaking congregation still met every Sunday afternoon just a few blocks from our home.

DIALOGUE: Leonard, can you explain again the chronology of your move to BYU? Was that about the time of Grace's death?

Arrington: She died in March 1982. We had been shifted administratively to BYU in 1980 but were allowed to remain in the Church Office Building until July 1982. She died while I was working on the Brigham Young book, and I was not emotionally prepared to work on the book for several months. I think I resumed writing in December 1982.

DIALOGUE: Do you think the Mark Hofmann bombings and forgeries set back Mormon historiography for a time? Do you feel that too many people started chasing those early interpretations rather than doing what they might normally have done?

Arrington: Well, some people did give up other projects. A good example is Ron Walker, who suspended his Heber J. Grant biography to work on early Mormon history. On the other hand, I wouldn't say that Mark Hofmann set Mormon historiography back, because we learned a great deal about the Joseph Smith period that we hadn't previously realized — not from Hofmann and his documents but because we had to study the period again looking for new insights. We got some first-rate articles from Ron Walker, Dean Jessee, Richard Anderson, and others.

You can look at the negative side of Hofmann and say that he led the historians astray, but his documents didn't have that much impact on our historiography. Basically he was forging documents that supported many traditional accounts. That is why many historians thought they were probably authentic; the documents simply reiterated what many historians had already concluded. The Hofmann episode had a positive side, too; we began to study previously neglected aspects of our history.

I had one such experience myself. I received from Brent Ashworth a photocopy of an 1867 letter Brigham Young purportedly wrote to a Weber County schoolteacher named Rose Canfield. I didn't see it until after the biography had been published, so I couldn't have used it even if I had thought it was authentic (we still do not know for certain whether it was forged, although several persons suppose it was). At any rate, I looked up Rose Canfield and discovered she had been a long-time teacher in Ogden and had taught the mothers of David O. McKay and George Albert Smith, Jr. I mentioned this in our book, *Mothers of the Prophets*. If Hofmann hadn't made up Brigham Young's letters to this woman (assuming that he did), I might never have studied her. I learned important things.

DIALOGUE: What do you think is the biggest difficulty facing Mormon historians in the 1980s and 1990s?

Arrington: The biggest difficulty is gaining unrestricted access to the wealth of material in the Church Archives. While I was in the Church Historian's Office (1972–82), we were able to make nearly everything available to scholars, both Mormon and non-Mormon, and that policy had a very positive influence on the image of the Church and its history. The atmosphere was one of openness and trust.

That policy has been abandoned. Permitting scholars to use materials only on a selective and restrictive basis gives the impression that the Church is hiding something. As one who had access to everything for years, I can say this policy represents excessive caution. Virtually everything in the Archives is positive and faith promoting. Denying access only keeps Church members and historians from reading uplifting, faith-promoting materials.

DIALOGUE: You found very little that would be embarrassing?

Arrington: Very little, and embarrassing only if it's taken out of context. Some day, I trust, Church officials will come to understand that.

DIALOGUE: Did you ever have an opportunity to argue that case?

Arrington: I did. President Lee seemed to agree with it, and so did President Kimball.

DIALOGUE: Actually, publications authored by people who worked with you in the Church Historian's department and had open access didn't embarrass the Church, did they?

Arrington: I don't know of any that did. Of course, some writings made individuals look human, and in some instances we gave some naturalistic explanations of events that some persons thought had only divine influence. In the long run, however, even the humanness is positive. We find imperfect humans easier to identify with.

DIALOGUE: Readers realize that their own problems and traumas can be handled if General Authorities have learned to handle their own.

Arrington: Exactly, and as they come to understand the imperfections of earlier leaders, current General Authorities can more easily reconcile their calling with their own problems and inadequacies.

DIALOGUE: What advice would you give to the young scholar of today who's interested in Mormon studies?

Arrington: Fortunately, innumerable topics can be studied without full access to everything in the Church Archives. In the first place, 80 percent of what is in the Archives is still available for study. Second, many materials in other archives and published material in other libraries would enable a student to treat interesting subjects.

Many biographies need to be written, and the principal sources are still in the hands of families, many of whom are willing to release them to a biographer. Because of the Church's policy, families now hesitate to give their material to the Church because they're afraid that even *they* — they who donated it — may lose access. I know of one instance where that happened. Years ago Hugh Nibley gave the Historical Department his grandfather's diary. I was present on one occasion when he came in and wanted to use it and the staff wouldn't let him, which was silly. He finally got permission to use it, but he had to argue long and hard.

Communities that started as Mormon settlements would be fruitful topics for research. Dean May and Ben Bennion are doing some fine things with that. I plan to do several village histories if I live long enough.

Before we conclude, let me emphasize the importance of Church history. It is the story of the Lord's dealings with his people. It is the story of our people's relationship with their environment, their neighbors, and with each other. It is a positive story — a story filled with hope, frustration, struggle, failure, and glorious achievement. It is the story of great people — people occasionally afflicted with human weaknesses but great nevertheless. Knowing our own history is as important as knowing the history of the people of the Bible and Book of Mormon. The Lord has told us to write our history, and we must do it!