

CHURCH HISTORIANS I HAVE KNOWN

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THIS TALK IS NECESSARILY GOING TO BE "ORAL HISTORY." As such it is suspect, as most oral history must be. Time plays tricks on our memories. It beclouds our judgment, confuses people, bends our interpretations, and at times causes us to read back into history certain *presentisms* which were nonexistent when the incident occurred. For all that follows I'll assume full responsibility. I've endeavored to check dates, events, people, and my reactions at the time the incidents I will relate took place, but I reserve the right to retreat from what I've said if evidence indicates that my statements are erroneous.

Back in the days before we knew what a wicked thing it was to teach people to work when they were young, my father had a printing shop on Richards Street just down the street from the south gates of the Temple. Seven of his sons grew up in that shop because there was a lot of hand work back in the days before automation. One day—as nearly as I can figure out, it must have been the summer of 1913 when I was somewhere around ten years of age—I was sitting at a table interleaving office forms when a rather stocky man with a dark mustache came in. My father turned and said, "What can I do for you, B. H.?" And the reply was, "Dave, I want you to print a pamphlet for me." He handed him a manuscript. It was the manuscript of the King Follett discourse. He said, "I completed reading the page proofs of volume six of *The History of the Church*, Period I. The book went to press. Shortly before it was put on sale, I received a call to tour the mission, and I was gone for three months or so. When I returned I found on my desk a leather bound copy with my name stamped in gold on the sixth volume. I flipped it open and put it up on the shelf. A Sunday or two later I was speaking

at stake conference, and I referred to the King Follett discourse. Somebody came up and asked me if that were in print. I said, 'Of course it is.' 'Well where?' 'It's in the sixth volume of the documentary history.'"

Roberts went on to say that during afternoon session of conference—and we used to have two sessions in those days—the man handed President Roberts the book and said, "I have looked through it and I can't find it." Roberts replied, "I know it's in there because I wrote it." He turned to the place where it should have been, but the sermon wasn't there. Sixteen pages had been left out of the book.

Well, Brother Roberts said when he got back in Salt Lake City he went to the bookstores and looked at the copies. The King Follett discourse was not in them! When he asked what happened to it, he learned that some of the brethren were not persuaded that the King Follett discourse was authentic. Now I don't know what the brethren meant in those days, but Brother Roberts did, and he said that he felt very unhappy about it! "David, I want you to print 10,000 copies of this sermon, and please hurry it through the press. I want to take them to the stake and mission conferences and give one to every member of the stake presidencies and high councils and bishoprics, and presidents of the missions and the branches. I'll give this wider circulation than that book will ever get."

This was the spirit I sensed a good many times later in the man: he was a scrapper! Brother Roberts passed the sermon around to a good many people. Some years later my father gave me one of the original copies—the little pamphlet Roberts had had printed and distributed throughout the Church to make up for the omission of something he had a strong conviction about. When they printed the six volumes of *The History of the Church* for the Melchizedek Priesthood quorums in the 1950s, they put the chapter back in.

The thing that interests me about this episode is this: I wonder what we lost when Roberts did not get that chapter in. There's some evidence, I think, that he became quite angry, even antagonistic about this. He did not continue these books from 1912 to 1932—a 20-year stretch. Although Roberts worked on the seventh volume, *Apostolic Interregnum*, he had originally planned a multi-volume series. He had been writing the material which appeared in the *Americana Magazine* between 1909 and 1915. When this magazine became defunct in 1915, he hurried his work through. He skimmed over church history very rapidly in the last chapter. He brought the story of the Church down to a summary of a church financial report in 1915, having covered the administrations of President Snow, President Woodruff, and the first years of the Joseph F. Smith administration in a very few pages. There are only a few people who have ever seen the originals of those articles. A member of the first Council of Seventy, one of the Seventy along with B. H. Roberts, Joseph W. McMurrin, subscribed to *Americana*, and saved every edition of it. Through the courtesy of Sterling McMurrin we have them in the library of the Salt Lake Institute of Religion.

By 1930, centennial of the Church, we were still lacking a history. When President Grant asked President Roberts what he could do about it, Roberts resorted to bringing in what he had already done. The Church, I understand, had paid for the plates—the illustrations—although there are here and there some that were not church plates, engravings of another type, pictures that the editors of the series apparently thought would be beneficial. So Roberts, in rather a quick

fashion, went through this earlier publication, doing some revising here, eliminating bits here, adding sentences there, making slight changes—not too many of them. This was published as the *Comprehensive History* for the centennial year 1930. I think he would have carried on both jobs had it not been for the earlier insult.

When World War I broke out in April 1917, we had a very small professional army in the United States. They mustered into service the national guard units, using them as a skeleton national army, recruiting heavily. Down on Main Street about where the Tribune Building stands, they put up a 75 millimeter fieldpiece. The Utah National Guard became the 145th United States Field Artillery. On the street, recruiters were working to build up their regiment for war strength. I was too young to enlist, but I was as excited about war as most kids are. When I had to make deliveries on Main Street, I'd walk a block or two out of my way on the way back to the shop to look at the gun and to see the people standing around it. One day I saw a much larger crowd than usual. I made my way through the crowd and got up on the front line. There I saw a man in a khaki uniform standing with his foot on the tailpiece of the cannon. It was the same man my father had called "B.H." At home I heard some rumblings from my parents and from other people who came in the house about the propriety of a general authority of the Church joining the Army as a chaplain. But how could a church leader better serve the spiritual needs of the youth than by accompanying them to battle—encouraging them to maintain their ideals and making himself available for wise and intimate counsel? Roberts' stock went up about 1,000 percent in my estimation!

Roberts kept his own political convictions. I was teaching up in Rigby Stake in Idaho in 1928 or 1930—it was an election year. Roberts, you know, was a life-long Democrat. Our stake president was just the reverse—a red-hot Republican, a Republican National Committeeman, the Republican representative on the United States Commission, a man who nominated William E. Borah for the Senate and helped keep him there for thirty years. When I went to teach seminary he met me with three instructions: "Brother Lyon, we want you to settle down, buy a home, and vote the Republican ticket." This is how strongly he was committed.

It so happened that a good number of apostate Mormons were the leaders of the Democratic Party in Idaho. Having heard that Brother Roberts was coming to stake conference, they asked him to come a day early, at the same time a Republican rally was being held. There was quite a bit of trouble about it because the stake officers met Roberts at the train, the stake president took him into his car and the stake president addressed the Republican rally that night. On Saturday afternoon the stake president took Roberts away from the Democrats to meet with the official stake family. The stake president said to Roberts, "Do you think it's proper for a General Authority to attend a stake conference and to hold a Democratic rally at the same time?" I was present and I heard Elder Roberts' reply: "If John Henry Smith [formerly a counselor in the First Presidency and the father of George Albert Smith] could hold a Republican Rally while he went to stake conference, why can't I do the same thing for the Democratic rally?" Nobody pushed Roberts around.

In June 1933 or in the latter part of September 1933 just before Roberts died, I came down from Ricks College on my way to spend the summer at Berkeley,

California, to go to school. (Or was it when I was here in town being set apart to preside over the Netherlands Mission?) Anyway, Don B. Colton, former Congressman for Utah who had just been appointed president of the Eastern States Mission, was just going in to talk to B. H. Roberts. When he saw me in the hall of the church office building, he invited me to come along. Roberts met us at the door and told us to sit down. This is approximately what Don B. Colton said: "You spent four years between 1922-1927 as president of the Eastern States Mission. I am overwhelmed by the responsibility of directing the missionaries and making the mission productive. I'd like to capitalize on your experience so that I won't have to repeat your mistakes and can go ahead without a great deal of trial and error. If you were going back into the mission field today with your experience, what would you do that would improve the efficiency of the missionaries that you did not do when you were president there?" Roberts said, "I'd call all the missionaries into mission headquarters for three months and convert them to the gospel of Jesus Christ or send them home." Here was Roberts in the closing period of his life summarizing in one sentence the secret of what he thought was successful missionary endeavor.

B. H. Roberts, it appears to me, was the first historian who attempted to break away from writing church history as propaganda, making a conscious effort to move into historical objectivity. He tried to present both sides of the controversial events in our history. Without him we might still be waiting for someone to spearhead the movement so ably undertaken by this Davis County blacksmith.

My awareness of Andrew Jenson was well advanced before I knew what church history was or should be. Back in the days when I was a youngster, there used to be a service in the Tabernacle every Sunday afternoon at 2:00, except on Fast Days or when general conferences were in session. The Tabernacle Choir sang at those Sunday afternoon sessions. I remember Evan Stephens led the choir and John J. McClellan played the organ. I can't read a note of music as big as a barn door, but I have profound respect for that organ and for the people who play it.

We used to live about a mile and a fourth from church, and on Sundays my father and I used to walk down. Sometimes church work kept my father from doing it and I went alone. I was amazed to see what they were doing in the way of music. Although I had no adequate appreciation for it, it intrigued me. There were some speakers that I liked and some that I didn't, but I suffered through long and dreary sermons often lasting an hour and fifteen minutes just to hear the closing song. Some of the speakers I remember were President Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, Anthony W. Ivins, Charles W. Penrose, David O. McKay, John A. Winder, Anthon H. Lund, George Albert Smith, Joseph W. McMurrin, B. H. Roberts, Levi Edgar Young, J. Golden Kimball—oh, I loved him—and others.

Five speakers fascinated me in particular. This was because they talked about people and what people did, about pioneering in the early Church, about personality conflicts, events, the struggles of the Mormons who settled the intermountain states. The five—Heber J. Grant, B. H. Roberts, J. Golden Kimball, Levi Edgar Young, and Andrew Jenson—were all good story tellers. These are the ones who

fascinated me. Scriptures and theological discussions, talks about righteousness, admonitions that were never explained, exaltation and so forth, left little impression on me. But I could understand these men who talked about people. My father was also a personal friend of Andrew Jenson, often doing printing for him.

From time to time, when my father did an unusually good job, Andrew Jenson would come down to congratulate him. I tagged along a time or two and shook his hand. I was excited to think that I had shaken the hand of somebody who spoke in the tabernacle—one I understood and liked. I read his works, and I had great respect for him and the thoroughness with which he did everything.

In my work with Nauvoo Restoration I've been trying to run down the diaries and journals old pioneers are supposed to have kept. About nine times out of ten, after I think I'm hot on the trail, I find Andrew Jenson was already there. For instance, fourteen volumes were being held by the James Friedman Berg family up in Mantua, Utah. Jenson made two trips up there to talk them into depositing them. They were always going to do it, but they never did. I found some of the letters that the family had. (Berg built the two-story part of the building that's the Browning gunsmith shop in Nauvoo. He was also an ancestor of Brother Delbert Stapley.) Well, I found that I was following in steps where Andrew Jenson had already been. He either got the documents or he didn't, but if he didn't get them, nobody could!

I'm going to tell you a personal story about the man. We were holding a mission president's conference in Paris, France, 1937. Richard R. Lyman, president of the European mission, was presiding. George D. Pyper of the Sunday School General Board was attending a convention of Rotary International at Nice. Andrew Jenson and his daughter Eva, the mother of our good brother Earl Olson, were also there. They were on their way to Denmark to present the Rebild National Park with a covered wagon as part of a display that was to be put up there memorializing the part that Danish immigrants had played in the colonization and pioneering of America. They were also going to each mission to gather up documents accumulated since he had been there the last time. When we gathered together each morning, Richard L. Lyman would call on Brother Pyper to sing a solo or to lead us in a song—he was quite a singer. Brother Lyman would always start off with embarrassing eulogies and so forth. Brother Pyper, who was a mild and modest person, would take it, and take it, and blush, but it still went on day after day.

One evening there were ten of us sitting around the table. Brother and Sister Jenson and their daughter were there with some other mission presidents and their wives. Wally Toronto, the President of the Czech Mission, said, "There is one woman that cut Brother Lyman down to size. In Prague there was an American-born person of Czech descent. He knew the Czech language, and he was assigned to be one of the attaches to the embassy in Prague. He was married to an American girl. She had not been raised in the Church and did not sustain all of the general authorities, yet she was one of the few people who seemed to be interested in the message. When Brother Lyman visited Prague, they invited this woman and her husband to come to the mission home to have dinner with President Lyman. Brother Lyman had a great way with women. He would pass out flattery endlessly. She tolerated it about as long as she could, then she said to

him, 'Mr. Lyman, whether you cut it this way [→] or this way, [↓], it's still baloney.'" We laughed, but we tried to hush it because the other mission presidents were sitting at the table. We kept it as still as we could. I noticed that Brother Jenson was very disturbed. He didn't like it.

The next morning when Brother Pyper was called upon to lead the singing, and the big eulogy started, Brother Pyper said, "Richard"—Brother Lyman's hearing aid hadn't warmed up yet and he was quite deaf. Again he said, "Richard." No response. Finally, he said "Richard" and moved his arms → and ↓. That ended the eulogy. Brother Jenson was embarrassed, in fact, he was shocked. As we went out to get our lunch he said, "It was humorous, but Brother Pyper should not have done it. It showed disrespect for a General Authority. We must never indulge in such light mindedness concerning them." Andrew Jenson was an indefatigable collector of historical information, documents, oral histories, a chronicler striving for complete and accurate coverage, a man of profound respect for those in authority over him. He died in his ninetieth year, I believe.

Another assistant historian was A. William Lund, affectionately known as Will Lund. All historians had great admiration for the man, as I did, but sometimes he could be provoking. He was my quickest source of supply for years and years at the Institute—some thirty-three years. I was always getting questions, and if people wanted a quick answer, I could pick up the phone, and he could give an answer in short order. And they were usually pertinent answers. Sometimes he'd give verification based on his own personal experience and observations, sometimes salted with humor.

One day two students got into an argument about the Urim and Thummim. The question was, "Do they still have it or don't they have it?" One quoted from Joseph Smith writing in the *Pearl of Great Price* that he had delivered the Urim and Thummim to the angel Moroni in whose possession it was as far as he knew at the time it was being written. But a talk given by a religion professor at the institution south of here in the "Know Your Religion" Series claimed that the First Presidency used the Urim and Thummim every day in making their decisions. The argument got so hot that two of the listeners walked into my office and asked, "What do you think about it?" I said, "Let's call A. William Lund." He said, "I doubt the story. My father Anthon H. Lund was a member of the Twelve and the First Presidency from 1899 to his death in 1921. I came to work in the Old Historian's Office across the street more than forty years ago. I knew everything that was in that office, and I never saw it. When we moved into this building in 1918, I supervised the packing of every box that was packed, checked them out of that building, checked them into this office, and supervised the unpacking. It was not in the Historian's Office. I moved the office of the First Presidency from the old office east of the Lion House including the contents of the Church safes, and it was not there. It is not on any inventory." He added, "Of course President Smith could have smuggled it into his office under his overcoat, but I doubt it."

I called Brother Lund often: when they introduced the sacrament in the Sunday schools, when water replaced the sacramental wine, when the Aaronic Priesthood program became the youth program of the Church rather than for adults, when questions about second endowments came up. Brother Lund and Andrew Jenson were unending sources of encyclopedic knowledge about the

Church. But Brother Lund fit into the old school who viewed the function of the Church Historian's Office in a very different fashion from what we see today. He saw it as a repository for documents and books which were to be *preserved* but not necessarily *used* for writing or interpreting historical events. The office was not one of production, but of accumulation. Underlining this concept I think was perhaps the command given to the Saints in the early days in the Midwest to gather up all material—encyclopedias, papers, books,—that would be witnesses against the enemies of the Church in case of court trials suing for redress or in preparation for the day of judgment. (You'll find this statement in Doctrine and Covenants—section 143: 1–8.)

Another side of A. William Lund was his defensiveness. One of the researchers in my office had the record book of one of the early wards or branches back east. It was a family tradition that one of her ancestors had been a member of the Church since Kirtland, Ohio when his parents had joined the Church there. But they had a record of his baptism sometime around 1885 in one of the wards in Utah, and they'd come there wanting to find out why there was a baptismal date in 1885 when it should have been back there in the 1830s. The researcher found it, called Brother Lund over, and said, "Here it is." It turned out that he had been excommunicated from the Church in the early 1880s for adultery and a few years later had been rebaptized.

She asked Brother Lund what she should do. "Shall I go and tell them or not?" His answer was characteristic of him. He said, "To provide the real story would destroy the pride of a large family in their ancestor and would embarrass them." His closing comment was that she should remember that the Church Historian's Office records are not to gratify curiosity but to build faith and respect for people. Brother Lund held pretty true to this idea.

When I began research on the Nauvoo Restoration Project, I was one day reading the *Nauvoo Neighbor* on microfilm, looking for material on the cultural and economic life in the city. I found an advertisement of Joseph W. Coolidge, who was a building contractor and cabinetmaker in Nauvoo, who as we know from the records, had the contract to build the Mansion House. He had a number of young men apprentices in his employ who lived in his home while learning the trade. Apparently one of them who had run away from his apprenticeship agreement had been sent by Coolidge to the various hardware stores in town to buy hardware items that they needed over in the shop. Coolidge published in the paper a warning to the Nauvoo merchants not to charge anything to his account ordered by this young man. He was not responsible, as the young man had left his employ. I made a copy of the advertisement because I thought it was pretty good. Here was a man large enough to have three or more apprentices working for him. Brother Lund saw me just as I was lighting the microfilm up and asked me what I was doing. When I showed it to him, he tore my note to bits and threw it in the wastebasket. I said, "Brother Lund, what's the matter?" He said, "Oh, you can't have that." I said, "Why not? This shows people trying to attain a high standard of achievement in their work. They're putting youngsters through a long apprenticeship to teach them the way things ought to be properly made—they tried to perpetuate the skills of their crafts!"

Brother Lund said, "Oh no, our enemies would use it against us." And I said,

"How on earth would anybody use a simple thing like that against the Church?"

"Oh, you'd be surprised how they twist these things around. They would make it appear that we had slavery at Nauvoo."

Well, I said to him, "Brother Lund, I can go down to the Genealogical Society and get it. I can go to the Utah Historical Society and get it. I can get it at the University of Utah Library." He said, "I'll have to call them and tell them not to let anybody copy it." He had what I think was a survival of a persecution complex; he couldn't get out of it. But he was a great man anyway, and we all loved him.

In 1969 Howard W. Hunter and his two sons, both residents of California—practicing attorneys and early morning seminary teachers—had decided to go east to prepare themselves for the next year's course of study in the seminaries. They and their wives flew to the east coast, rented a car, went up to Vermont, and started trailing back across the country back to the various church historic sites. They reached Nauvoo on the 20th of July. They were going to spend half a day touring and taking pictures. It fell to me to take them around on a tour. We reached the Wilford Woodruff house, and we were in the kitchen where I was explaining how the brick oven worked—that they built a fire and got a lot of hot embers, shoveled them into the brick oven, closed the door part way, and let the gas escape—the carbon monoxide. When the ashes had all cooled off they'd sweep it out and fill it again. When they got it hot enough to bake they'd put their roasts and bread in the oven and keep the fire steady in the grate to keep it from losing all of its heat. I said, "You know, this is where they got their thick crusted bread. Brigham Young used to say that a woman who couldn't bake bread with a crust an inch thick didn't know how to bake bread. This is how they were able to have a bread and milk supper; whereas if you try it today all you get is mush."

Elder Hunter stood there a minute and said, "I can almost smell the aroma coming out of that oven. I haven't tasted bread like that for years." My wife, who was standing nearby, said, "If you'll stay over, I'll cook some for you for dinner."

After dinner was over we were sitting there talking. My wife had fixed the dinner with everything grown locally that they might have had in the days of the Mormons living in Nauvoo. She gave them some locally corn-fed beef, some locally grown vegetables—green corn, summer squash, and so forth, topping it off with freshly picked wild blackberries and fresh baked cookies.

Then the questions began: They asked four questions. First, how did the Mormons, lacking capital, banks, and mortgage lending institutions, build Nauvoo to the largest city in the state in less than seven years? Second, what conditions led to the death of Joseph and Hyrum Smith? Third, what caused the depression after they left Nauvoo in 1846? Fourth, how did they manage the moving of 16,000 people from Nauvoo, organizing them for the long trip to the Far West?

It was midnight before we had examined these questions in some depth. Time and again I tried to turn away from their questions, but you know when you have three lawyers after you it's a pretty hard thing to do. I'd dodge and try to change the subject, and they'd call me back. Well, I fear we slaughtered some sacred historical cows that night. I did my best to try to get out of it. Then they went to their hotel.

On May 14, 1970, while I was packing up to go back to Nauvoo for the summer, I found copies of some records that had to be delivered to Brother Olson. When I took them over to his office, I had to wait outside. Brother Hunter, who had been made church historian earlier that year, came out, took me by the arm, and led me in, where he began to tell Brother Olson the story of his visit to Nauvoo the previous year. Then he said, "My sons went back to California and they made their slides into an organized affair—took their tapes and made the record to go with it. And when they came up to conference they played it one evening for their family." Then he said, "Of all the historic sites we visited, the tour of Nauvoo was the most exciting. On other sites we saw physical objects and were told a story, but the places seemed to lack the human element. Nauvoo was the only place where people were alive so we could relate to them. We felt their hopes, struggles, frustrations, fears, and above all, their undying testimonies of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, his successor, and their willingness to sacrifice their world acquisitions and creature comforts to maintain the spiritual values which they had acquired through accepting the covenant of the restored gospel. The real Nauvoo story is more exciting than the myth we have made up about it." Then Elder Hunter said, "That's the way I feel about it. It seems to me that the real story of the Church must include all facets of life—it must be people-oriented, not divorced from the problems of living beings and concerned only with abstractions." A new era was about to dawn in our church history interpretation!

The academic years 1937–1950 are a historical blur to me, commencing with one room on the first floor in the University Ward chapel on University Street which doubled as a classroom and office for me and served as a Sunday School and MIA classroom during the week. Our challenge was to build the enrollment of the Salt Lake Institute of Religion on the campus. In 1940 we had two classrooms, a library, two offices and the lounge shared by fellows and girls. We moved into our new office building on December 31, 1950, but we were swamped. There were two of us with more than 1200 students, and it took night and day, because we were functioning with them in social activities as well.

My historical interests had pretty much gone down the drain. For fourteen years I had done practically nothing in this field. My only contact in that whole period had been with the *Utah Historical Quarterly*. Then one day in the spring of 1950 a manila envelope came to the Institute, with a return address on it, Department of Economics, Utah State Agricultural College. Inside was a reprint of an article from the *Journal of Economic History* entitled "The Deseret Telegraph: A Church-Owned Public Utility," by Leonard J. Arrington. At the top, the author had written "For Ed Lyon." Thus was I introduced in a rather startling way to the present LDS Church Historian. Why he had chosen to honor me, an obscure institute teacher, with this reprint (and in the ensuing years with many of his reprints and monographs), I'll never know. But it was a turning point in my life. It reawakened in me an interest in Mormon and Western American history which had been slumbering. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Leonard J. Arrington, for this generous prod of twenty-two years ago. It has meant much to me. And I congratulate him on his present assignment, which is to fulfill what I feel was Elder Hunter's viewpoint.