



President Wilford Woodruff received a revelation in 1894 on the importance of tracing ancestry for the purpose of temple work. The revelation led to the establishment of the Society. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.



## Chapter 1

# Small Beginnings

**L**ong before the Latter-day Saints founded a genealogical society, a number of Church members made extraordinary efforts to gather family information. While these attempts to locate genealogical records were largely individual, the Church offered encouragement and assistance when possible. The major impediment to genealogical research in nineteenth-century Utah was the inaccessibility of sources. The ancestral records of the typical Utah resident were scattered far outside the territory and usually outside the country in homes, institutions, archives, offices, churches, and cemeteries. The Saints' continuing personal and cooperative search for these records together with an important doctrinal revelation to President Wilford Woodruff helped set the stage for the founding of the Genealogical Society of Utah in 1894.

### Personal Genealogical Activities

Among the Saints in Utah, Church leaders often set the example in the search for family records. The brothers Orson and Parley P. Pratt, both Apostles, were among the first to begin an organized search for family records. In 1853, while serving a mission in Washington, D.C., Orson Pratt responded to a newspaper advertisement placed by the Reverend Frederick W. Chapman requesting information concerning the descendants of William Pratt of Massachusetts. Chapman provided Elder Pratt the connecting links between him and his earliest New England forebear.



Elder Pratt later published a Pratt family genealogy, thereby becoming the first Latter-day Saint to systematically research and publish his family history. In 1873 he reported that his ancestry had been traced back eleven generations and that the families of the Pratt brothers had been baptized for about three thousand of their ancestors.<sup>1</sup>

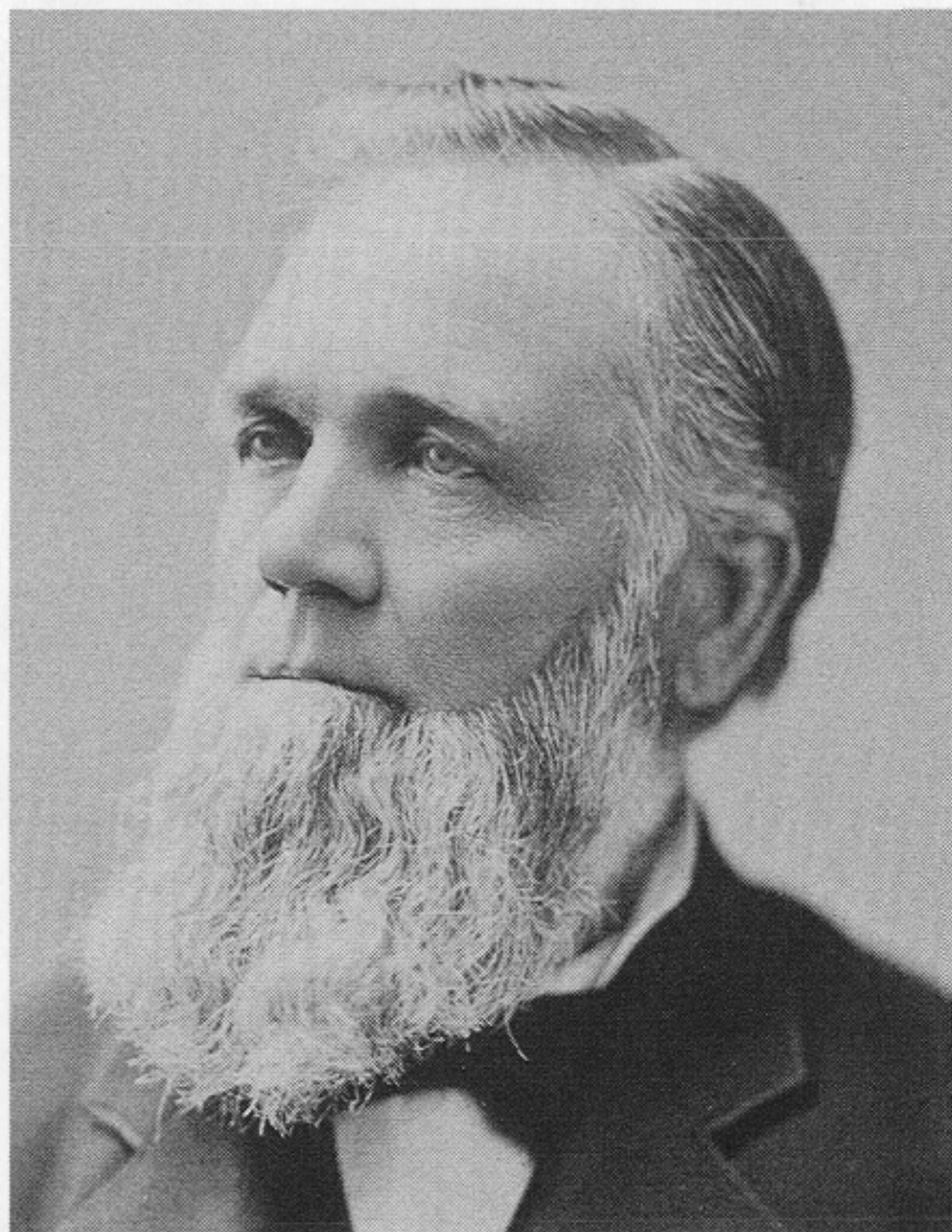
Likewise, Wilford Woodruff, who became President of the Church in 1889, was an exemplary part-time genealogist. While doing missionary work in London in 1840 and again in 1846, he spent part of his time gathering Woodruff genealogy. Eventually he gathered hundreds of Woodruff names, obtained a family coat of arms, and traced his direct ancestry in America to some of the earliest New England settlers.

Apostle Franklin D. Richards was one of the most well known of the nineteenth-century genealogists in the Church. He served as assistant Church historian for many years and from 1889 until his death in 1899 as Church historian and general Church recorder. In a patriarchal blessing, Elder Richards was told that he should be involved in work relating to the dead.<sup>2</sup> He gathered genealogical records in England and the United States through letters and personal research. On 23 November 1885, he wrote in his journal, "I find that I have 2,801 names of Richards and those who had married in connection with the Richards race baptized for and recorded in my family record book."<sup>3</sup> He spent the next three days working on his books and by 26 November had recorded 3,434 names of persons for whom vicarious baptism had been done.<sup>4</sup>

In 1884 Elder Richards's personal library became the basis for the first Church genealogical library when he agreed to sell it at cost to the Church Historian's Office.<sup>5</sup> An avid collector of books, he continued to add to the collection, and by 1889 the library contained over two hundred publications of the New England Historic Genealogical Society as well as many other valuable genealogical publications.<sup>6</sup> Known for his extensive work even outside Utah, that same year Elder Richards accepted an invitation to join the New England society.

Elder Richards did much to help other Saints. He frequently ordered books for other people and for the temples. Church members





Elder Franklin D. Richards, first president of the Genealogical Society, 1894–99.

often turned to him for advice on building their own genealogical libraries.<sup>7</sup>

On 23 May 1890, Elder Richards and his son Charles started out on a genealogical excursion—a twenty-three-day trip that took them to several eastern states where they sought out relatives, visited graveyards, searched

town records, and gathered all the family names they could. It was an effort later emulated by other Church members both in that century and this. In Pittsfield, Massachusetts, they found a cousin and spent an enjoyable evening with her family. They found the graves of several family members, including that of Elder Richards's great-grandmother. They ended their eastern tour in Philadelphia, where they copied many names from the city directory. Upon returning to Utah, Elder Richards wrote in his journal, "Thanks and praise to God for the information that I was enabled to obtain . . . of men whom I never saw before concerning our Dead that I may prepare a proper Record of my work such as will be acceptable when the dead shall be judged out of the Books that shall have been written."<sup>8</sup>

Church members in the Territory of Utah used various other means of gathering information. They corresponded with members elsewhere on genealogical matters. Those who left on proselyting missions were often pressed into research service by relatives and friends. Presumably the missionaries helped when they could, although too much time spent on genealogical work could drastically interfere with missionary labors. In one case, Elder Franklin D. Richards received a letter from a woman who wanted a list of all missionaries going to Europe so



she could ask them to help with her genealogies. This, of course, was inappropriate, but Elder Richards suggested that she write the president of the British Mission in Liverpool, providing the names of her parents and the parish and shire where they and their ancestors had lived. The mission president would then ask the Elder in that area to visit the parish clerk to see if the appropriate records were there and to find out how much it would cost to have them copied. Elder Richards astutely commented that they should not tell the parish clerk that the information was for temple work. The religious purpose might antagonize him, but since other people were doing genealogy simply for family interest, this approach would be more likely to persuade him to furnish the material at a reasonable cost.<sup>9</sup>

One missionary, Benjamin F. Cummings, provided an unusual amount of help. He went on two missions within the United States, one from 1876 to 1877 and another in 1878. During his first mission, he interspersed his missionary work with genealogical work for other people. Before his second, he was specifically assigned by Orson Pratt and others to search records and gather genealogies.<sup>10</sup> Charles C. Rich of the Council of the Twelve publicly recognized the work of Cummings in 1878, when he told a Paris, Idaho, audience that "an opportunity is now offered by Brother Cummings, by which some of us may obtain our genealogies, and we should improve it as much as possible. I feel happy in being able to send to the States where many of my ancestors have lived and died, so as to get the names."<sup>11</sup>

Cummings devoted the rest of his life to genealogical and temple work. In 1892 he went on an extended tour of the eastern United States to learn about their record-keeping systems. His goal was to develop a kind of national clearinghouse for both genealogical and temple work. In an 1893 letter to the First Presidency of the Church, he proposed to invite all American families to send him their genealogies. He would index them, collect published works, and attempt to prevent duplications while facilitating research. He felt he could save work and expense for many researchers by putting related people in touch with each other. He also wanted to help arrange genealogical material for temple work and agreed that since this work was sacred, he would keep the



cost low and not do it for "speculation."<sup>12</sup> Though given approval by the First Presidency, he was unable to pursue this project before his death in 1899.

For Church members, perhaps the most readily available source of help for genealogical research in the 1880s and 1890s was the Church Historian's Office, particularly through the dedicated work of Elder Franklin D. Richards. One of the duties of the Historian's Office was collecting genealogical information from missionaries as they came to Church headquarters on their way to their mission fields. In addition, Elder Richards provided personal research assistance to many people who wrote or came to the office. Sometimes he charged a nominal fee for the time spent.<sup>13</sup> On other occasions, he simply gave advice. With all his other responsibilities, however, he had less and less available time. By 1893 he was directing some inquiries to Benjamin F. Cummings Jr.<sup>14</sup>

During these early years, some Church members attempted to establish their own genealogical organizations. Scottish members pioneered this effort. In 1879 a notice appeared in the Church-owned *Deseret Evening News* calling for a meeting of all Saints of Scottish descent who were interested in a united effort to promote research. David McKenzie of Salt Lake City and Alexander F. McDonald of St. George attempted to collect the names of interested people. The meeting was to be held in Salt Lake City during the October 1879 general conference.<sup>15</sup> The results of that meeting remain unknown, but that same year Alexander McDonald was called to preside over the Saints in Salt River Valley in Arizona.

While not in a position to actively participate in a Utah-based organization, McDonald did not give up on the idea of a united effort. In 1888 he proposed the creation of a genealogical bureau, particularly for the benefit of Scottish members of the Church. His dream, which he soon realized was somewhat unrealistic, was ultimately to have all the Scottish records copied and the copies brought to Utah.<sup>16</sup>

On 20 June 1888, John Nicholson, one of McDonald's collaborators, wrote President Wilford Woodruff about the Scottish plan. President Woodruff was delighted, for he, too, was concerned that individual efforts were often costly. More cooperative efforts, he believed, could save money as well as provide more thorough



research. Besides, he observed, "there is danger also of much work being done twice in the temple, for the want of system on the part of those who officiate."<sup>17</sup>

President Woodruff fully endorsed the plans being formulated by Nicholson, McDonald, and others.<sup>18</sup> The result was the founding of the Latter-day Saints' Genealogical Bureau, with John Nicholson as president and Douglas A. Swan as secretary. The Bureau's initial emphasis was to be on Scottish research. Nicholson and Swan, along with Alexander F. McDonald, William Budge, and Duncan McAllister, were also directors. The impetus was initially provided by Nicholson and Swan. The other three directors did not even reside in Salt Lake City at the time. Duncan McAllister, for example, was on a mission in England, acting as manager of business affairs in the Church office at Liverpool. He must have been surprised when he received a letter written on 24 September 1888 on Latter-day Saints' Genealogical Bureau letterhead, with his name listed as a director. "You will see by the enclosed circular," Nicholson and Swan explained to him, "that we have used your name in connection with an enterprise that you will doubtless deem laudable. . . . When you come home, all business will be open to your inspection. Please do not object to the use of your name in so good a cause; you were so far off that we could not reach you in time to consult you."<sup>19</sup>

Nicholson and Swan also wrote to George Teasdale, president of the European Mission, asking permission to use John Hays, a missionary in the Edinburgh district, to work for them. They wanted Hays to devote part of his time to obtaining genealogical information from the civil registry office in that city. They were willing to reimburse him for his time, thus making his missionary expenses less burdensome. They hastened to assure the mission president that theirs was no money-making scheme. They intended to charge their clients "barely sufficient to cover expenses."<sup>20</sup>

The founders had ambitious plans for the new bureau. They proposed to establish a permanent agent at the headquarters of the Church in Liverpool who would know the location of all missionaries. Family research requests would be sent to the missionary nearest the parish designated. This missionary "tracer" would send his report to the Liverpool agent. If more information



might be obtained in another parish, the agent would forward the request to the appropriate missionary. The genealogists believed this plan would save considerable money by eliminating the need for one person to travel widely around the country.<sup>21</sup> The Latter-day Saints' Genealogical Bureau sent out circulars and advertised in the press.

Nicholson and Swan's ambitious plan was the natural result of the frustration of many dedicated Mormon genealogists who saw an important work floundering for want of organized cooperative efforts. How long the organization lasted is not clear, but by the time the Genealogical Society of Utah was founded in 1894, the Latter-day Saints' Genealogical Bureau was not functional.

Other Church members also provided professional help in genealogical research. Hiring a professional was usually much less expensive to individuals and families than an attempt to do the research on their own. In 1892 the services of James B. Walkley of London were publicized in the *Deseret Evening News*:

Any of our friends who desire to obtain genealogical information in England can gain it on reasonable terms by engaging the services of Brother James B. Walkley of 19 Burton Street Euston Road London. He has been working at the business with good results for some time.

He can collect all necessary 'data concerning persons who have died from 1837 to date, at the rate of \$7.50 per hundred names or if preferred at twenty-five cents per name. It costs him about \$6.00 per hundred names and the \$1.50 is what he charges per day for his work. For dates previous to 1837, outside of London, he would require traveling expenses. We are informed that he is capable and reliable and those who avail themselves of his aid may confidently expect to receive satisfaction.<sup>22</sup>

## Genealogical Missionaries

It was almost inevitable that the Mormon custom of calling missionaries for almost every important project should be adapted to genealogical work.<sup>23</sup> The genealogical missionaries seldom, if ever, received official calls to be missionaries. Theirs were self-appointed missions. Once they decided to go, however, they were invited to Salt Lake City to receive a blessing for their missions



from a General Authority. Also, they were often given missionary cards, which allowed them travel discounts. The trip to Chicago in 1883, for example, would cost the missionary only \$6.25.<sup>24</sup> Franklin D. Richards's journal is replete with entries concerning blessings he gave to people for genealogical missions.<sup>25</sup>

Armed with missionary zeal, missionary cards, letters of appointment, and a special blessing from a Church authority, the genealogical missionaries set out. They visited relatives, copied family Bibles and other records, and asked an unending stream of questions regarding their ancestors. They visited parish churches, where they spent long hours searching through old registers, and trekked to cemeteries seeking the gravestones of their relatives. Many missionaries reported spiritual experiences that gave them firm assurance that the Lord was with them and had miraculously directed them to their needed sources.

The surviving missionary records are incomplete, but it is clear that between 1885 and 1900 at least 178 Saints became genealogical missionaries.<sup>26</sup> Most were middle-aged or elderly men; however, some young men and women, as well as a few couples also went. A few came from Arizona and Idaho, but most were from Utah. The majority went to Great Britain. There was no set length of service, and the time spent varied from a few weeks to over three years.<sup>27</sup>

The story of one genealogical missionary illustrates the nature of their activities. John Adams Wakeham was converted to Mormonism in Boston in 1845 and returned to New England as a regular missionary in 1882. Nine years later, at age sixty-nine, he returned again, this time as a genealogical missionary. Wakeham spent about three and one-half years on his genealogical mission, most of the time in the vicinity of his ancestral home in New Hampshire. On one occasion, he walked four miles to the home of James H. Neals, seeking a relative he had never met. To Mrs. Neals, who answered the door, he explained in his customary fashion that he was a relative of the Copp family, some of whom had settled in that area, and that he was seeking to know more about his kindred. "I was directed to you as being the granddaughter of William H. Copp," he told the woman. "Therefore if you will give such information as you possess of the history of the family, I will



be greatly obliged.” For fifteen minutes, the suspicious woman interrogated the missionary about his ancestors but finally said that even though she was alone, she would let him in because he had an honest face. She had been attempting to gather genealogy herself, although with limited success.

Wakeham did not spend all his time doing genealogy. At times he stopped to see old friends, sometimes staying long enough to help them with their work. He spent parts of two summers on the farm of A. H. Wentworth helping with the harvest. All his friends and relatives were kind, but he was saddened at the end of his mission that he had been unable to convert any of them to the Church.

One of Wakeham’s most helpful genealogical contacts was Doctor John R. Ham. While examining Ham’s extensive genealogical library, Wakeham found the name of Edward Wakeham, his great-great-grandfather. He also learned that one of his great-grandfathers was a Native American. This information confirmed a family tradition, but it was also particularly significant to Wakeham. His patriarchal blessing had identified him as a literal descendant of the biblical Joseph who was sold into Egypt. Church teachings identified many Native Americans as descendants of Joseph, and for Wakeham, this genealogical discovery in Dr. Ham’s library was a welcome confirmation of a sacred personal blessing.<sup>28</sup>

Most genealogical missions were of relatively short duration. The success of the missionaries varied, but in the end their efforts resulted in many additional family records being brought to Utah, as well as in the completion of considerable amounts of vicarious temple work.

## **A New Revelation**

With the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple in April 1893, the Church began a new era of temple work. Because the temple was located in the major metropolitan center of the Church, the potential for temple attendance increased dramatically. Members in Salt Lake City no longer had to travel sixty miles north to Logan or hundreds of miles south to Manti or St. George to perform proxy ordinances.



The next year, President Wilford Woodruff made a pivotal doctrinal announcement that had an important effect on genealogical work and temple activity. At the time of the dedication of the Salt Lake Temple, sealing ordinances were limited to the first generation beyond the first family member to join the Church. Husbands and wives were sealed for eternity by the power of the priesthood, and men and women were sealed by proxy to their parents if their parents were deceased. But it was also a custom for a man and his family to be “adopted” into the family of a Church official or other prominent priesthood bearer.<sup>29</sup> The Saints apparently believed this action would secure the salvation of their families in a worthy priesthood lineage if their own progenitors did not accept the gospel in the next life. The request for this ordinance was usually initiated by those wishing to be adopted into a given line. As the requests came, Church leaders willingly responded, and the “adoption” ceremony was performed in the temple.<sup>30</sup> Some members chose to be adopted directly by a Church leader, while others were sealed to their natural parents and then had their parents adopted by a Church leader.

Thus many, and perhaps most, Church members were more concerned with simply collecting names of ancestors than with organizing those names into specific family units. While proxy baptisms and endowments were administered for deceased progenitors as a matter of course, it was not incumbent upon the living to also perform proxy sealings. The lack of emphasis on sealings reduced the importance of extending family lines beyond one generation.

The practice of adoption raised doctrinal questions about the organization of eternal families.<sup>31</sup> President Wilford Woodruff was so concerned that he made the issue a matter of special prayer. The result was a new revelation which the President discussed in depth with the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve on 5 and 6 April 1894.<sup>32</sup> After obtaining their endorsement, he presented the revelation to the membership of the Church during a general conference address on 14 April.

Significantly, President Woodruff’s announcement was based on the doctrine of continuing revelation, which held that the Lord would “give unto the faithful line upon line, precept upon



precept,” as they were prepared for new ideas or information (D&C 98:12).<sup>33</sup> Joseph Smith, President Woodruff said, “accomplished all that God required at his hands. But he did not receive all the revelations that belong to this work, neither did President Taylor, nor has Wilford Woodruff. There will be no end to this work until it is perfected.” Then, after emphasizing how fervently he and his brethren in the leadership of the Church had prayed for a better understanding, President Woodruff announced the change in policy:

Now, what are the feelings of Israel? They have felt that they wanted to be adopted to somebody. . . . When I went before the Lord to know who I should be adopted to (we were then being adopted to prophets and apostles,) the Spirit of God said to me, “Have you not a father, who begot you?” “Yes, I have,” “Then, why not honor him? Why not be adopted to him?” “Yes,” says I, “that is right.” I was adopted to my father, and should have had my father sealed to his father, and so on back; and the duty that I want every man who presides over a Temple to see performed from this day henceforth and forever, unless the Lord Almighty commands otherwise, is, let every man be adopted to his father. When a man receives the endowment, adopt him to his father; not to Wilford Woodruff, not to any other man outside the lineage of his father. That is the will of God to this people. . . . We want the Latter-day Saints from this time to trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and mothers. Have children sealed to their parents, and run this chain through as far as you can get it. . . . This is the will of the Lord to his people, and I think when you come to reflect upon it you will find it to be true.<sup>34</sup>

At the conclusion of President Woodruff’s sermon, his first counselor, George Q. Cannon, recognizing that the practice of adoption had resulted in some haphazard policies so far as family units were concerned, commented on the impact the new policy would have on genealogical work:

There has been a disposition manifested among our people, to some extent, for some men and women to gather up all the names of families, whether they were related or not, and perform ordinances for them. I am a believer in this when it does not interfere with the rights of heirship. We should do all we can for those for whom we have friendship, or to whom we are attached in any way, and who have no living representatives that we know of in the Church. But you can see the advantage of pursuing now the course that is pointed out by the word of God to us. It will make everyone careful



to obtain the connection, and to get the names properly of the sons and daughters of men, to have them sealed to their parents. It will draw the line fairly. It will define lineage clearly. "But," says one, "that may take a long time." Well, we have got a thousand years to do it in. We need not be in such a hurry as to create confusion.<sup>35</sup>

The question of validity naturally arose in regard to ordinances already performed which had adopted people to someone other than their natural parents. The First Presidency and the Twelve ruled that old records would be left standing, leaving it to the wisdom of God to deal with the problems of human error.<sup>36</sup>

### **A Society Is Organized**

The change in the law of adoption was an important step toward the organization of a genealogical society. The new revelation required Latter-day Saints to commit themselves even more fully to collecting and organizing accurate family records.

Discussion of a Church-sponsored genealogical organization actually had begun at least as early as the administration of Church president John Taylor (1880-1887), but nothing was done at the time.<sup>37</sup> In 1893, Duncan McAllister, previously associated with the Latter-day Saints' Genealogical Bureau, importuned the Church on this issue. On 16 February, he wrote President Wilford Woodruff, decrying the unnecessary expense of individual research. He estimated that about fifty people each year went to Europe for genealogical purposes at a cost of about \$500 each, which meant an average annual outlay of \$25,000. This was in addition to the expenditures of regular missionaries, who often spent part of their time in genealogical research. McAllister was concerned that most of these people were unskilled in research techniques. He estimated that one person with ordinary accounting skills could, with occasional help, accomplish more than fifty unskilled persons working in the haphazard manner of many enthusiastic travelers and at one-tenth the cost. To prevent such inefficiency, he urged the formation of a Church genealogical bureau that would concentrate initially on the British Isles, where most research trips were being conducted, and then expand. The bureau should function under Church auspices, he suggested, so that the Saints would



have confidence in it and so that duplication in temple work could be prevented.<sup>38</sup>

McAllister was only one of several genealogists pressing for a Church-sponsored organization that would make record gathering a more cooperative, productive effort and at the same time reduce the cost to individuals. In personal meetings with the First Presidency, a number of genealogists urged the need for an organized effort. At the same time, the external pressures on the Church were easing, leaving it with the ability to turn its attention to other, more vital pursuits. Wilford Woodruff, an avid genealogist, was President of the Church and had received an important revelation related to temple work. The time was ripe for the formation of a permanent, official genealogical association through which the Church could more effectively support the genealogical activity important to the work of the temple.

At least as early as 27 July 1894, Franklin D. Richards, John Jaques, and A. Milton Musser were examining versions of a proposed genealogical library corporation.<sup>39</sup> On 1 November 1894, at their regular Thursday meeting, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve approved the articles of incorporation of the Genealogical Society of Utah. They instructed Elder Richards to begin organizing the Society, and they appointed him to become the first president.<sup>40</sup> The official organizational meeting was held in the Historian's Office on 13 November with Elder Richards acting as chair. Also in attendance were other prominent Church historians and genealogists: assistant Church historians John Jaques, A. Milton Musser, and Andrew Jenson; James H. Anderson, a member of the editorial staff of the *Deseret News*; James B. Walkley, who had spent years doing genealogical work in England and who is credited with writing the first letter to the leaders of the Church urging the organization of a society; and Duncan McAllister, assistant recorder in the Salt Lake Temple.

The Articles of Association of the Genealogical Society of Utah announced three types of purposes for the organization: benevolent, educational, and religious. The benevolent goal was to be met by establishing and maintaining a genealogical library for the benefit of Society members and others; the educational purpose was to disseminate information regarding genealogical matters; and



the religious goal was to acquire records of the dead in order to enable the performance of Church ordinances on their behalf. Clearly the overriding concern was religious, and the articles provided that the association would “be conducted in harmony with the rules and order of the said Church.” To house the new society, Elder Richards offered the free use of an upstairs room in the Historian’s Office. The offer was accepted with gratitude.<sup>41</sup>

Elder Richards’s first official act was to telegraph the presidents of the Logan, Manti, and St. George Temples, informing them of the new organization and inviting them to become members. The next day, he received telegrams from each of them, all agreeing to join.<sup>42</sup> On 19 November, Franklin D. Richards was officially elected president, with John Nicholson as vice president and James H. Anderson as secretary. A. Milton Musser was elected treasurer, John Jaques was made the librarian, and Andrew Jenson became a director. The following day George Reynolds was also elected a director. These seven men constituted the first board of directors of the Society.<sup>43</sup>



Old Historian’s Office, 1908, at 58 East South Temple, Salt Lake City, was the location of the Genealogical Society, 1894–1917.



On 21 November, Franklin D. Richards, James H. Anderson, and A. Milton Musser appeared in the Salt Lake County Probate Court and filed the Society's articles of incorporation. The filing cost was \$16.25, and the Certificate of Incorporation was issued the next day.<sup>44</sup> The Genealogical Society of Utah was a legal entity.

Significantly, the new society did not focus on helping only Church members. Membership in the Society was open to anyone "of good moral character."<sup>45</sup> This decision set the precedent for the work of the Genealogical Society in providing assistance to all interested persons, a policy the Society follows to this day.

### The Library

In order to provide research materials for members, the Society began to build a library collection. Two days after the Society was organized, Bishop George Taylor of the Salt Lake Fourteenth Ward sent a carpenter to the Historian's Office to construct shelves on the allotted floor. On 22 November, President Wilford Woodruff ordered the existing library—Elder's Richards's personal collection of three hundred books previously purchased by the Church—to be delivered to the Society within a week.<sup>46</sup>

The collection grew slowly—most of the additions coming from continuing donations by Elder Richards and a few others. Elder Richards used a general conference priesthood meeting in 1896 to urge stake presidents and bishops to visit the library and donate to it.<sup>47</sup> In addition, he obtained funds from membership dues and other fees to purchase books as he became aware of them.

Elder Richards industriously examined book catalogs and solicited donations from Church members and other acquaintances. He also recruited missionaries as agents to collect books. In 1896, for example, George Shorter was sent to England. Elder Richards gave him a certificate identifying him as a member of the Genealogical Society of Utah, as an "honorable and trustworthy gentleman," and as one who could do business for the Society. Shorter was authorized to receive donations of money and books, and potential contributors were reminded that the library was the only one of its character between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean.<sup>48</sup> Shorter was able eventually to purchase a few books

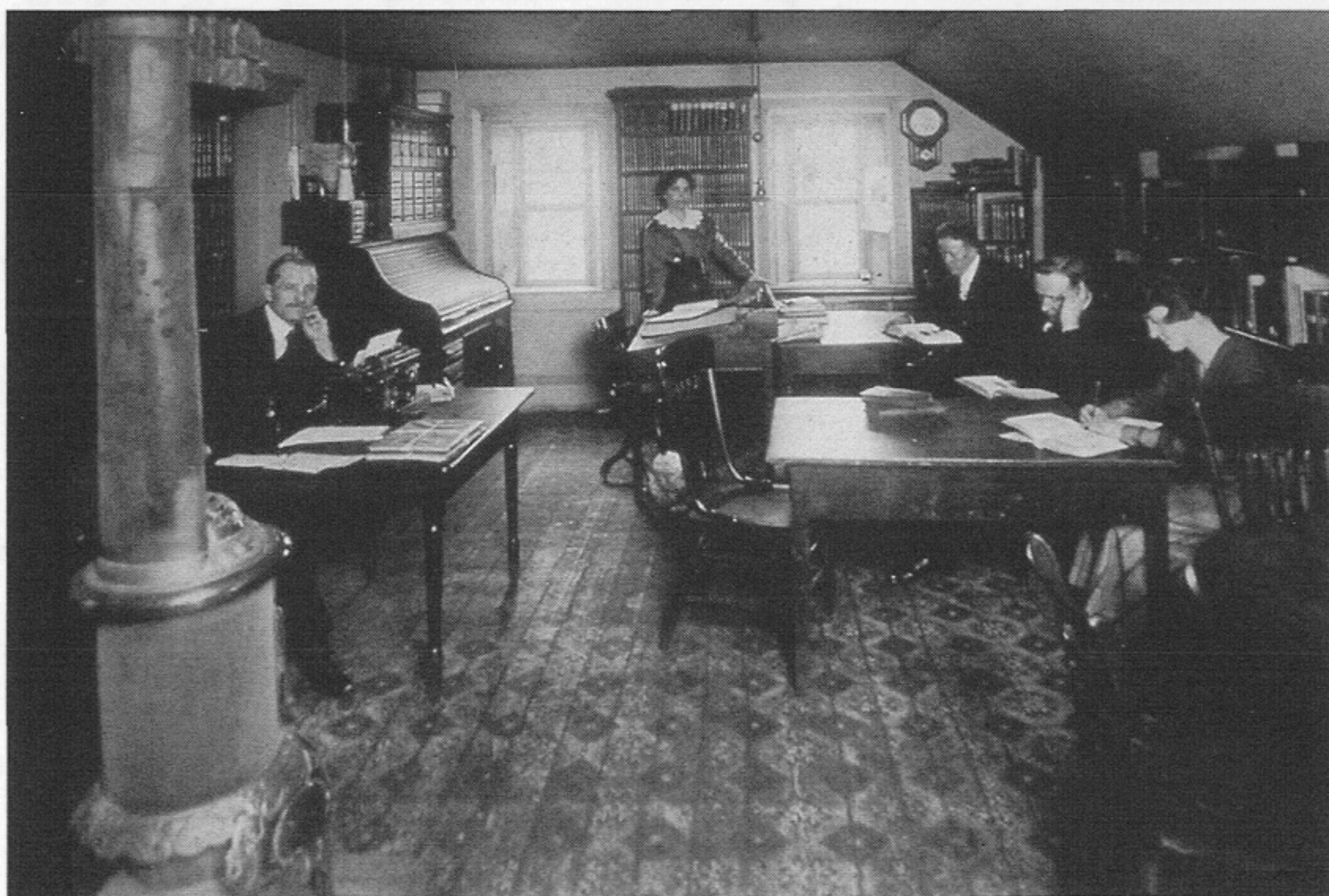


for the Society, as well as to perform other genealogical tasks for Elder Richards.<sup>49</sup>

Library books were hard to come by; the money to purchase them depended upon membership fees and donations. Nevertheless, within six years the library had increased its holdings by 50 percent—from 300 volumes to 450.<sup>50</sup> Seven years later it boasted 800 volumes.<sup>51</sup>

Initially, use of the library was restricted to members of the Society, but fees were low enough to encourage all serious ancestor seekers to join. The entrance fee was first set at \$2.00, though it was later raised to \$3.00, and the annual fee was \$1.00. Life membership was set at \$12.00.<sup>52</sup> Despite these modest rates, the membership grew slowly. In 1896 there were twenty annual and twenty-eight lifetime members. Three years later, there were forty lifetime members.<sup>53</sup> After another decade, the number had increased to 173—most of them lifetime memberships.

The Society soon provided a number of services to its patrons. Clerical help was available to copy genealogical material.



Genealogical Society Library reading room, ca. 1917, located on the upper floor of the old Historian's Office. Shown (left to right) are Genealogical Society staff members Nephi Anderson, Lillian Cameron, Joseph Christenson, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Bertha Emery.



Members were charged \$3.00 or \$3.50 per day at first, though by 1900 they were paying forty or fifty cents per hour. As a rule, those not having a Society membership paid 50 percent more.<sup>54</sup> Such clerical services apparently began in 1895, when a temple worker was assigned to spend part of his time doing research for library patrons,<sup>55</sup> but soon other clerks began to spend more time at this work. The Society also provided genealogical forms designed by a committee. By 1897 the Society had printed circulars about its program and distributed them to the various wards and stakes of the Church.<sup>56</sup> It also assisted families in organizing their records for temple work.

The clerks who performed this service were undoubtedly dedicated people, for they apparently received relatively small compensation for their labors. Neither the Society itself nor the Historian's Office had the funds to pay them. In one case, according to Elder Richards, one faithful assistant librarian was doing clerical work without pay until President George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency of the Church authorized him an allowance of \$25.00 per month in "tithing orders."<sup>57</sup>

### **Foreign Agents**

Among the initial aspirations of the founders of the Society was a network of paid genealogical agents outside Utah who would do research for others. The Society believed that genealogical research could be the most effective and the least expensive if done by experienced researchers. On 15 June 1897, three directors of the Society wrote a letter to their colleagues lamenting the fact that their operations would be limited until the Society could establish agents in different parts of the world. This could be done, they said, only by having the First Presidency designate various agents to fill the orders of the Society. George Carpenter, Henry H. Kinsman, and Julius Billeter were prime candidates. They would work in London, the eastern United States, and Germany, respectively.<sup>58</sup> The proposal was apparently approved, for the Society soon contacted a few people and asked them to work.

Henry H. Kinsman was a missionary in New England at the time. He had thirty-one years of business experience before going



on his mission. When he received this new request, he replied that he was unable to do much at the moment, as he was responsible for a new area and several new missionaries. During cold weather, however, and after he finished his mission, he would be happy to cooperate.<sup>59</sup> Later he accepted the terms offered him by the Society—to meet the actual expenses involved in his research and to give him fair and reasonable compensation for his time and efforts. As a member of the Society, he agreed to charge only the lowest rates, but since this work would require him to remain in New England after his mission, he asked the Society to pay his transportation home.<sup>60</sup> By 16 November 1897, terms had been agreed upon with both Henry Kinsman and Julius Billeter, and the Society had its first official field agents.<sup>61</sup>

To generate work for the newly appointed agents, the Society undertook an advertising campaign. A notice was published in the *Deseret News* on 1 May 1898, informing the public that the Society was ready to receive orders for research through its agents in New England, Germany, Switzerland, and Scotland. The Society also urged that this notice be read by stake presidents and bishops in public meetings. It promised three services: (1) it would procure the names of ancestors as far back as records would permit, (2) it would ascertain the relationship of the clients to these ancestors, and (3) it would arrange the accumulated names in family groups “as far as practicable.” The prospective client must make an initial deposit of \$10.00 with the Society. The balance of the cost could be paid either in installments or when the names were furnished. The following month, another advertisement published the names of “competent search agents.” Henry Kinsman was already in New England and would remain there. William Leggat would work in Edinburgh, Scotland. Julius Billeter Jr. would leave that fall for an assignment in Germany and Switzerland and in the meantime would do research in Utah for those who were interested.<sup>62</sup>

The response was not immediate. In September there were still not enough orders to justify the full-time employment of a European agent.<sup>63</sup> But at least the Society had agents available for those who were willing to pay. How many agents were employed in these early years is not clear, but the activity of Julius Billeter Jr. stands out and serves to illustrate their work.<sup>64</sup>



An immigrant from Switzerland, Billeter returned to his homeland as a missionary in 1892. This was a turning point in his career, for while in Europe, he took time to work in the genealogical records of both Switzerland and Germany. His appetite was whetted, and he soon developed a commitment to genealogical research that would last the rest of his life. After his return, he found himself in demand among the Swiss and German Church members who needed help in genealogical work. He determined he could be of best service if he went back to Switzerland and operated from there. This was the beginning of a career in professional genealogical work that would last until his death in 1957.

Billeter returned to Switzerland armed with numerous letters of recommendation intended to help him open doors to more research facilities. The Society gave him a letter certifying him as its agent and requesting any reasonable assistance that could be offered him. He also had a letter from the governor of the State of Utah, identifying him as "reputable and respected citizen of this State"; a letter of personal recommendation from Utah historian Orson F. Whitney; and a letter from Karl G. Maeser, a German convert who was serving as general superintendent of schools for the Church.

Billeter received his pay directly from the Society, based on the amount of work accomplished. The Society billed the client, adding 20 percent to the agent's fee in the case of Society members and 50 percent in the case of nonmembers. Even so, the Society believed that its fees were at least 50 percent less than those of other societies.<sup>65</sup> Billeter apparently accepted those conditions at first, but after a few years he became dissatisfied, partly because he was not receiving his money regularly. By 1903 he had begun to accept work independently of the Society, and soon he was working completely on his own.

It was probably inevitable that Billeter should have a few disagreements with the Society. The records suggest he likely had the same problems that often plagued other professional researchers. Some clients became dissatisfied when they did not receive all the information they thought their money should buy. They did not always understand why the agent could not do more in the time available to him. The agent could explain the situation,



but long-distance misunderstanding sometimes led to criticism and harsh words from both sides. In addition, agents were sometimes frustrated when their clients did not make agreed-upon payments. The agents' work was not just a religious commitment; it was also their livelihood, and they could ill afford to do research without pay. Yet the Society could hardly afford to send additional money until the client had paid. Apparently, such collection problems were among those that caused Julius Billeter discomfort and led him at times to criticize the policies of the Society.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, even after he resigned as a full-time agent, Julius Billeter's important contribution to genealogical work in the Church was well recognized and respected. He continued to work part-time for the Society, and he was recommended by the Society to people who wanted research done. His life's work, which he pursued doggedly over a period of sixty years, was to compile Church-oriented genealogies. He not only collected names for his clients, but also put them in appropriate order for temple work.<sup>67</sup>

The Society constantly advised inexperienced Saints that they could get their work done more cheaply and efficiently if they would work through professional agents rather than try to do the research themselves, but it also warned them against hiring researchers who were untrustworthy or irresponsible. Great care must be taken in recording vital data accurately, and the Saints were told that the Society's agents would be reliable. A typical warning was issued in 1905 in the *Deseret Evening News*:

The Saints here should, therefore, not entrust that work to irresponsible persons. When they cannot attend to it themselves, they should apply to the Genealogical Society with headquarters at the Historians' Office . . . in order that they may know that their genealogy will be traced correctly and as perfectly as the Old Country records permit.<sup>68</sup>

### Small Beginnings, Great Anticipations

The growth of the Genealogical Society of Utah during its early years was modest. The library collection grew steadily. Membership growth was equally gradual, standing at 173 in 1908. Sporadic research requests were sufficient to sustain only a handful of research agents in the eastern United States and Europe.



Yet this humble beginning did not limit the vision of the Society's founders, epitomized in 1912 in the words of Nephi Anderson:

In conclusion, let me suggest the future of this work. I see the records of the dead and their histories gathered from every nation under heaven to one great central library in Zion—the largest and best equipped for its particular work in the world. Branch libraries may be established in the nations, but in Zion will be the records of last resort and final authority. Trained genealogists will find constant work in all nations having unpublished records, searching among the archives for families and family connections. Then, as temples multiply, and the work enlarges to its ultimate proportions, this Society, or some organization growing out of this Society, will have in its care some elaborate, but perfect system of exact registration and checking, so that the work in the temples may be conducted without confusion or duplication. And so throughout the years, reaching into the Millennium of peace, this work of salvation will go on, until every worthy soul that can be found from earthly records will have been searched out and officiated for; and then the unseen world will come to our aid, the broken links will be joined, the tangled threads will be placed in order, and the purposes of God in placing salvation within the reach of all will have been consummated.

We live in a day of small beginnings, as far as this is concerned. We are still pioneers. We are but helping to lay the foundation of the "marvelous work and a wonder that is about to come forth among the children of men."<sup>69</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Brigham Young and others, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855-86), 16:300.

<sup>2</sup>Among the Latter-day Saints, a patriarchal blessing is a special blessing given by an ordained patriarch; it is intended to give direction in the lives of the faithful. It also indicates one's lineage. Receiving more than one such blessing officially is uncommon, though in the early days the practice was more loosely regulated. Franklin D. Richards's several blessings are recorded in his letterbooks. The blessing of 11 April 1859 told him, "You shall minister for many who shall be heirs of salvation, even many who have gone before you behind the veil." On 19 July 1875, he was told, "Much of your labor shall be devoted to the redemption of your dead. Your family also shall assist you and co-operate with you in your labors." The blessing of 7 October 1883 said, "Thou shalt do a great work in the earth both for the living and the dead." Franklin D. Richards letterbook, Richards Family collection, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus



Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). See also William J. Mortimer, "Patriarchal Blessings," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1066-67 (hereafter cited as *EM*).

<sup>3</sup>Franklin D. Richards journal, 23 November 1885, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>4</sup>Richards journal, 26 November 1885.

<sup>5</sup>Richards journal, 16 April, and 4 June 1884, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives. At the time, Elder Richards calculated the value of his library to be \$527.89.

<sup>6</sup>The New England Genealogical Society publications included the quarterly journal that had been published since 1846. Other valuable works included a file of the *New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, published quarterly since 1850. Franklin D. Richards to W. Cabell Truman, 19 December 1889, Richards letterbook, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>7</sup>His journal included many entries suggesting this. For example, 4 June 1884 he ordered two books for the Logan Temple, one a pronouncing gazetteer and the other a world geography; 14 April 1885 he placed an order for forty-one volumes of genealogical works to send to the Logan Temple to aid the Saints in the area; 27 June 1888 he corresponded with the Manti Temple president about genealogical books and records for the Manti Temple Association; 22 August 1888 he sent 192 volumes of genealogical works to the Manti Temple Association (but on 29 August 1893, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve decided to transfer the Manti Temple's genealogical library to the Salt Lake Temple, for there it would be accessible to more of the Saints generally). See also Franklin D. Richards to J. D. T. McAllister, 29 August 1893, Richards letterbook. The journal entry of 23 November 1893 indicates that he was supplying lists of available genealogical works to many Saints in the Territory of Utah.

<sup>8</sup>Richards journal, 15 June 1890.

<sup>9</sup>Franklin D. Richards to Mrs. Maria Newman, 19 May 1893, Richards letterbook, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>10</sup>Benjamin F. Cummings to the First Presidency, 8 March 1893, Genealogical Society correspondence, Family History Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter cited as FHD).

<sup>11</sup>*Journal of Discourses* 19:255.

<sup>12</sup>Cummings to the First Presidency.

<sup>13</sup>For example, he noted on 25 October 1884 that he received \$10.00 from George B. Spencer for "genealogy labor." Richards journal, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives. His journal contains many references to people coming in for help and advice in this period.

<sup>14</sup>Franklin D. Richards to the Cragin brothers, 13 December 1893, Richards letterbook, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>15</sup>*Deseret Evening News*, 2 July 1879.

<sup>16</sup>*Deseret Evening News*, 12 September 1888.

<sup>17</sup>Wilford Woodruff to John Nicholson, 22 June 1888, First Presidency letterbooks, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>18</sup>Woodruff to Nicholson.

<sup>19</sup>John Nicholson and Douglas A. Swan to Duncan McAllister, 24 September 1888, Duncan M. McAllister papers, LDS Church Archives.



<sup>20</sup>John Nicholson and Douglas A. Swan to George Teasdale, 24 September 1888, Duncan M. McAllister papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>21</sup>Douglas A. Swan to Duncan M. McAllister, 8 October 1888, Duncan M. McAllister papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>22</sup>*Deseret Evening News*, 5 January 1892.

<sup>23</sup>In pioneer days, Mormon settlers were called by the Church as missionaries not only to preach the gospel, but also to do a variety of tasks associated with building the kingdom. The establishment of many early settlements was the result of missionary calls. Missionaries were called to go to the gold fields, collect rags during paper shortages, open iron mines in southern Utah, and promote the Church's youth program and Sunday School. People were even "called," though not officially as missionaries, to study art in Europe and to become educated in other fields in the better schools of the United States. As would be expected, this practical application of the missionary tradition found its way into the genealogical impulses of the Mormons.

<sup>24</sup>Franklin D. Richards to C. M. Hubbard, 23 November 1883, Richards letterbook, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>25</sup>To cite only a few: 24 June 1885, "Sister Amelia Folsom Young desired that I would bless her for her journey East to assist her relatives in Ohio, Michigan, Mass and Conn to get genealogy. . . . I blessed her in the name of the Lord"; 25 September 1885, "Took genealogy and set apart Elders Wesley K. Walton and Aubury E. Easton both of Woodruff in Utah to go and visit their kindred to get genealogy of their ancestors in Maine. Gave them appointments"; 4 May 1886, "Blessed Elder Wm. Wallace White of the 11 ward SL City for a mission to visit, settle up the affairs of his father lately deceased and gather up his fathers family and their genealogy and bring them to Zion"; 6 July 1886, "Set apart Louie B. Felt and Charlotte E. Taylor to go to Wales to search for genealogy"; 18 May 1887, "Blessed Joseph Bull Jr. for a business visit of about 3 mos to England to get genealogies"; 9 March 1888, "I blessed Nils Bengtson of 8th ward and John Ludwig Berg a H P from Showlow of Apache Co AZ for missions to Scandinavia. Gave them regular certificates of appointment and each of them a letter of introduction to Priests Teasdale and Flygare stating their unusually great ages and their objects in going to do business, get genealogy and minister what they can."

<sup>26</sup>The following statistics were compiled by Jessie Embry from Missionary Record (1830-1906), Missionary Department, Church Library; and Richards journal. For further insight, see Jessie L. Embry, "Missionaries for the Dead: The Story of the Genealogical Missionaries of the Nineteenth Century," *BYU Studies* 17 (Spring 1977): 355-60.

<sup>27</sup>The profile of the 178 known missionaries, as compiled by Jessie Embry, follows. Note that some figures do not add up to 178, because the full information was not always available.

Age: under 20, 1; 20-30, 6; 30-40, 7; 40-50, 32; 60-70, 16; 70 and over, 6.

Sex: male, 135; female, 43.

Home residence: Utah, 128; Idaho, 7; Arizona, 2.

Mission to: Great Britain, 90; United States and Canada, 51; European continent, 2.

<sup>28</sup>John Adams Wakeham, autobiography, John A. Wakeham collection, LDS Church Archives.



<sup>29</sup>For a full discussion of this practice, see Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830-1900," *BYU Studies* 14 (Spring 1974): 291-314; *EM* 2: 810.

<sup>30</sup>One example of a request for "adoption" is reflected in a letter from President Wilford Woodruff to Mrs. Mary Pixton:

Dear Sister: In the matter of adoption of yourself and Brother Pixton to me, as referred to by letter from President Wm Paxman to-day—I will say that I am quite willing to have that ordinance attended to when it [is] convenient for me to be at the Temple. I will endeavor to keep this matter in mind so that when I am at the Temple and you being also present your wishes may be granted. Should you hear of my going to Manti in the near future you can then be present.

Wilford Woodruff to Mrs. Mary Pixton, 17 November 1890, Wilford Woodruff letterbooks, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>31</sup>See Irving, "The Law of Adoption," 310-11, for examples of certain modifications that were being made even before the announcement of President Woodruff's revelation.

<sup>32</sup>Wilford Woodruff journal, 5 and 6 April 1894, Wilford Woodruff collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>33</sup>See also *Journal of Discourses* 19:12; "Article of Faith," 9.

<sup>34</sup>President Woodruff's address may be found in several places, including *Deseret Evening News*, 14 April 1894; *Deseret Weekly*, 21 April 1894, 541-44; *The Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* 13 (October 1922): 145-52 (hereafter cited as *UGHM*); and James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833-1964*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 3:252-60.

<sup>35</sup>The full text of President Cannon's sermon may be found in *UGHM* 13 (October 1922): 152-58; and the *Deseret News*, 14 April 1894.

<sup>36</sup>Irving, "The Law of Adoption," 313. See citations listed in his footnote.

<sup>37</sup>Wilford Woodruff to John Nicholson, 22 June 1888, First Presidency letterbooks, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>38</sup>Duncan M. McAllister to Wilford Woodruff, 16 February 1892 [1893], Duncan M. McAllister papers, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>39</sup>Richards journal, 27 July 1894, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>40</sup>See journals of Wilford Woodruff, Franklin D. Richards, and Abraham H. Cannon, LDS Church Archives for 1 November 1894.

<sup>41</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 13 November 1894, FHD; Richards journal, 13 November 1894, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>42</sup>Richards journal, 13 and 14 November 1894, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>43</sup>Richards journal, 19 and 20 November 1894; Genealogical Society Minutes, 20 November 1894.

<sup>44</sup>Richards journal, 21 and 22 November 1894, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>45</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 13 November 1894; *UGHM* 25 (October 1934): 164.



<sup>46</sup>Richards journal, 12 and 15 November 1894, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>47</sup>Richards journal, 7 April 1896, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>48</sup>Franklin D. Richards to George Shorter, 20 March 1896, Richards letterbook, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>49</sup>Franklin D. Richards to George Shorter, 31 August, and 4 November 1896, Richards letterbook.

<sup>50</sup>John Jaques to Newel Knight Palmer, 27 July 1900, Genealogical Society correspondence, FHD.

<sup>51</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 15 October 1907, proposed circular letter; *Deseret Evening News*, 2 November 1907.

<sup>52</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 19 January 1895; George W. Willis to Nellie Hawkes, 19 July 1900, Genealogical Society correspondence, FHD; *Deseret Evening News*, 2 November 1907.

<sup>53</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 18 April 1896; Richards journal, 28 April 1899, Richards Family collection, LDS Church Archives.

<sup>54</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 19 January 1895, 28 March 1896; Wm. H. Perkes to Mary A. Thomas, 8 February 1897; William Willis to George Mason, 21 November 1900, Genealogical Society correspondence, FHD.

<sup>55</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 18 June 1895.

<sup>56</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 19 November 1897, 2 May, 28 June, and 19 July 1898.

<sup>57</sup>*Deseret News*, 5 September 1896; William Perkes to Ebenezer Bryce, 28 December 1899; Franklin D. Richards to James Jack, 30 April 1897, Genealogical Society correspondence, FHD.

<sup>58</sup>John Nicholson, George Reynolds, and A. Milton Musser to the President and Board of Directors of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 15 June 1897, Genealogical Society correspondence.

<sup>59</sup>Henry H. Kinsman to John Nicholson, 7 October 1897, Genealogical Society correspondence.

<sup>60</sup>Henry H. Kinsman to John Nicholson, 10 November 1897, Genealogical Society correspondence.

<sup>61</sup>John Nicholson, George Reynolds, and A. Milton Musser to the President and Board of Directors of the Genealogical Society of Utah, 16 November 1897, Genealogical Society correspondence.

<sup>62</sup>*Deseret Evening News*, 18 June 1898.

<sup>63</sup>Genealogical Society Minutes, 20 September 1898.

<sup>64</sup>The following information is based on memoranda by Henry E. Christiansen, temple ordinance coordinator of the Genealogical Department of the Church, dated 21 September 1976 and 2 December 1976, located in his files in the Genealogical Society office, as well as miscellaneous entries in the Genealogical Society Minutes and the Richards journal. Christiansen obtained much of his information from Julius Billeter's son and from his own research in the minutes.

<sup>65</sup>John Jaques to Julius Billeter, 11 December 1900, Genealogical Society correspondence, FHD.



<sup>66</sup>All this is only implicit in the sketchy information available, but it fits the pattern of problems described by Henry Christiansen, who for many years served as supervisor of the research department of the Genealogical Society. The record is abundantly clear that Billeter and the Society had disagreements and that money was one of the major issues involved.

<sup>67</sup>In addition, Billiter built a magnificent personal file of genealogical material, which he willingly placed at the disposal of the Church mission office in Switzerland in 1946. In Salt Lake City, meantime, the board of directors of the Genealogical Society authorized the preparation of a typed transcript of his records, to be housed in Salt Lake City. The file was so voluminous that after two typists had worked for two years they still had covered only about 20 percent of the material. It was estimated that it would take a total of ten years to complete the project, so the Society decided in 1949 to have the records sent to Salt Lake City for microfilming. Julius Billeter's life-long commitment was exemplary, and through his career as a professional genealogist he made an invaluable contribution to the Church.

<sup>68</sup>*Deseret Evening News*, 27 April 1905.

<sup>69</sup>Nephi Anderson, "Genealogy's Place in the Plan of Salvation," *UGHM* 3 (January 1912): 21-22.