Mormon Folklore: Cut from the Marrow of Everyday Experience

Stories tell as much or more about the people who tell them than the subjects they are about. The forthcoming BYU Studies *volume entitled* Mormon Americana *(1994) will contain chapters describing many specific areas within Mormon studies: architecture, art, literature, material culture, museums, performing arts, photography, pioneer trails, science, and the following article on folklore.*

William A. Wilson

One of the few characteristics all human beings hold in common is the propensity to reduce their lives, and what is most important in those lives, to stories. We are, all of us, inveterate storytellers. We talk about our jobs, our hobbies, our successes and failures, our courtships and marriages, our children, and our religious beliefs and experiences. We do so because in order to communicate effectively to others what is in our hearts and minds we must make the abstract concrete—we must transform experience and belief into narrative. It would follow, then, that to know each others' hearts and minds, we must know each others' stories. Certainly this principle holds true in our study of Mormons and their folklore.

This essay describes the archives that make Mormon folklore available for research. Experience has taught me, however, that unless I first say something about the nature of folklore and about the contribution it can make to the study and interpretation of Mormon life, some scholars will not pay serious attention to a subject they have too often deemed frivolous.[1]

The Church is awash with stories. Members talk constantly of hardships faithfully endured by pioneer ancestors, of present-day

persecutions, of missions, of conversions, of God's interventions in individual lives, of admiration for and sometimes frustration with Church authorities, of acts of sacrifice and kindness performed by charitable Church members, and of the day-to-day delights and sorrows of Church membership.

Because these stories are cut from the marrow of everyday experience and reflect the hopes, fears, joys, and anxieties of common Church members, they bring us about as close as we are likely to get to Mormon hearts and minds and to an understanding, from the lay membership's point of view, of what it really means to be Mormon. Yet these stories have been largely ignored by interpreters of the Mormon experience—partly because they are "just stories" and partly because until the 1980s they have not been adequately collected, archived, and made available to researchers.

Consider the following two accounts detailing events from the pioneer trek west and from the settlement of central Utah:

> The McDonalds were among the several thousand Mormons who lost all their worldly possessions in the tragic mid-winter exodus from their beloved homes in Nauvoo. With little food and scant protection from the elements, they suffered greatly from hunger and disease at Winter Quarters and during their long migration to Salt Lake City. Yet on reaching the Platte River crossing, they were still in sufficiently good condition to kneel together and thank the Lord for getting them through the worst part of the journey.
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> During the river crossing cholera broke out among the members of the company. The terrible disease raged throughout the camp. Dozens died. It was necessary for James McDonald to assist in digging graves for the victims. James was a willing worker and finished three graves that October morning, even though he began to feel a little ill as he started the third. A short time after the last grave was completed, James was dead from the effects of cholera. His young daughters Elizabeth and Jane helped their mother wrap him in an old blanket, place him in the grave, and cover him with the dirt he had spaded up two hours earlier.[2]
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> * * * * * * * * * * * *
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> After the Indians and the white people had become a little friendly, they didn't go to the fort quite as often. This one day there was this girl down in town and she was washing. They lived quite close to the hills and Indians were camped quite close in the foothills. This girl was washing; she had a washing machine that was an

> old wooden one that had a wheel that would turn. This Indian brave came down and he had long braids. He came down and he started acting smart to her and talking smart to her and she couldn't understand him. He wanted different things that she had at her home; she wouldn't give them to him. When she wouldn't give them to him, he grabbed her and started throwing her around. She grabbed one lock of his hair, his braid, and hurried and put it into the wringer [of the washing machine] and wound it up tight and fixed it so it couldn't run back, and then she turned and fled while he was tied to the wringer.[3]

The teller of the first story, the great-great-grandson of one of the little girls who helped bury her father, will not easily turn from the faith his ancestor died for. But the story is more than just a family narrative. It, as well as countless stories like it, stands as a metaphor for the entire migration experience and for the faith and courage of the pioneers who endured these hardships that life might be better for those who would follow them. The view of the past reflected in such stories may or may not square with historical reality, but to the investigator trying to fathom the religious commitment of those who have told and listened to the stories, historical veracity may prove less significant than the fact that these people have generally believed the stories and have therefore been motivated by them to honor their ancestors and remain faithful to their church.[4]

The second story might easily be dismissed as an engaging piece of local color interesting to the amateur history buff yet of little consequence to serious scholars. But to the careful researcher, the narrative recounts a paradoxical tale: It mirrors a time when Mormon settlers and local Indians lived on the fringes of open hostility toward each other. It captures a continuing Mormon fascination with that time. And it draws in heroic lines a portrait of a typical pioneer woman who bravely and resourcefully faced down marauding Indians and whose courage can inspire contemporary women facing a new set of dangers in today's society. But, in an age when we supposedly value cultural diversity and practice ethnic tolerance, the narrative also reflects and perpetuates an uncomplimentary and dehumanizing picture of Native Americans. Probably the Native Americans, whose valleys the early Saints moved into, would tell quite different stories of the pioneer

settlement. The story serves, therefore, as an unsettling reminder that we have failed to reach our stated ideals (we do not usually ridicule those we consider our equals) and that we have some distance to travel before we overcome old animosities.

Both these stories, then, can enhance our understanding of crucial Mormon beliefs and attitudes that lie behind Mormon actions. Both are part of that ocean of story we call Mormon folklore. To the uninitiated, folklore may seem not unlike that other important ocean of story we call oral history. Though the line between the two is sometimes blurred, folklore differs from oral history in at least one significant way. Oral histories are first-person accounts told by individuals who witnessed or participated in the events they describe. Folk narratives, on the other hand, are third-person accounts narrated by individuals who have heard about the events they describe from others.[5]

Neither the oral history nor the folk narrative will ever fully capture the truth of "what really happened," but the oral history will come closer to that end than will the folk narrative. Folk narratives will yield a different, but equally important, kind of truth. Kept alive by the spoken word as they are passed from person to person through time and space, folk narratives will be formularized by the storytellers, usually unconsciously, to make them more aesthetically appealing and persuasive; and they will be reshaped, again unconsciously, to reflect not so much the events recounted, but rather the storytellers' attitudes and beliefs toward these events. In other words, some of these narratives comprise what we might call a "folk," or "people's," history—that is, a history generated by the folk (in this case the Mormons), circulated orally by them, constantly re-created in the process in response to their current needs and concerns, and reflective of what is most important to them. In our attempts to deepen our understanding of Mormon life, we ignore such stories at our peril.

Because the stories given above describe the pioneer era, they may strengthen a common misperception about folklore—that it is always tied to the past. Folklore will, to be sure, tell us something of the past, but, as we shall see, it will usually tell us much more of the present. Folklore provides keys to understanding

contemporary culture for the simple reason that people keep alive those practices and tell those stories that interest them most. Once people lose interest in particular practices or stories, these will disappear. The folklore current at any given time will therefore serve as an excellent barometer, helping us plumb the beliefs and emotions of the people who possess the lore. The following narrative, known widely in Mormon country, is a good example of a story born in recent times and reflective of current needs and interests:

> A dear L.D.S. lady left her small family in Phoenix to go to the temple in Mesa. While she was in the middle of a session, she got a strong feeling that she should go home—that something was terribly wrong. The feeling wouldn't go away, so she told the temple president and asked him what she should do. He said, "Have no fear. You are doing the right thing by being here. All is well at home." So she continued the session. She hurried home when she was through and found her six-year-old daughter in bed. She asked her daughter if something was wrong. She told her mother that she had left the house while the baby sitter was busy with the other children and had gone out by the canal near their house. While she was playing, she slipped on some grass and fell in. She couldn't swim, and the canal is deep. Many people drown this way. But a lady all dressed in white came along just then and got her just before she would have drowned. The lady set her on the bank and made sure she was okay. The little girl asked the lady who she was because she knew that the lady didn't live near by. So, the lady told her what her name was. The lady who saved the little girl was the lady whom the mother had done work for in the temple that day.[6]

To believing Mormons, this story speaks many messages. It encourages them to persist in the search for their ancestral roots; it testifies to the validity of temple ordinances; it suggests that God is a caring God who will protect them in time of need; it stresses the importance of the family and strengthens family ties; and it gives them hope that these ties will continue beyond this life. These messages are brought forcefully home by an artistic performance designed to move listeners to action and are made all the more powerful by the narrative symmetry in which two lives are saved at the same moment—the physical life of the young girl and the eternal life of the rescuer, the mother serving as the link between the two. It is, therefore, an important artifact for anyone

interested not just in the Mormon past, but also in Mormon social organization, Mormon belief, and Mormon creative expression.

Because the materials of folklore are traditional—existing among the people only in the spoken word or in customary practices—many of the stories recounted by earlier generations of Mormons and applied to the circumstances of their lives have been irretrievably lost. A few of these stories did make their way into early Church publications, albeit without the social contexts necessary to give them life. The bulk of them, however, were not preserved for the simple reason that no one was there to record them. Fortunately, as scholars have gradually become aware of the wealth of intellectual history embodied in folklore, they have begun redressing past neglect and, in order to enhance their understanding of Mormon life, have turned to stories once ignored.[7]

Because the materials of folklore reside not on library shelves, but in the minds of people, informed study and interpretation of Mormon folklore must always be preceded by three steps: collecting, archiving, and indexing.

Collecting

Fieldwork in Mormon folklore commenced in earnest in the 1930s and 1940s. Thomas E. Cheney and Lester A. Hubbard began collecting Mormon folksongs. Hector Lee gathered stories of the Three Nephites—ancient American disciples of Christ allowed, according to the Book of Mormon, to "tarry in the flesh" until the second coming of the Savior. Austin E. and Alta S. Fife crisscrossed the highways and byways of the Mormon cultural region, recording a full range of Mormon expressive forms and, in the process, bringing together one of the most important personal collections of folklore in the United States.[8]

Beginning in the 1960s and inspired by the work of their predecessors, a second generation of folklorists began to break new ground: William A. Wilson and Richard C. Poulsen at Brigham Young University; Jan H. Brunvand and Margaret Brady at the University of Utah; Barre Toelken, Steven Siporin, Barbara Walker, and Jay Anderson at Utah State University; Joe Peterson at Dixie College; Thomas Carter, formerly at the Utah Historical Society

and now at the University of Utah; David Stanley at Westminster College; Carol Edison, Craig Miller, and Annie Hatch at the Utah Arts Council's Folk Arts Program; and Hal Cannon at the Western Folklife Center.[9]

Not only have these scholars collected a considerable body of folklore themselves, but also those teaching at universities have for three decades sent scores of students armed with notepads, tape recorders, and cameras into the field to collect folklore. Under the direction of their professors, these students have brought together a massive body of material, much of it dealing with Mormons. Some of these student collections are understandably weak, but many are first-rate and, taken together, provide a depth and range of topics earlier collectors, working alone or in pairs, could not hope to reach. To demonstrate the nature and use of folklore archives, I have focused in this essay on one of the dominant forms of Mormon folklore, the legend—a story generally told as true. In fact, the archives contain a broad range of Mormon folk materials: verbal lore (songs, jokes, sayings, as well as legends);[10] descriptions of customs (medicinal practices, courtship and marriage practices, and family and community traditions and celebrations);[11] and slides and photographs of material objects (handicrafts, gravestone markers, and architecture).[12]

The first generation of collectors, like their contemporaries, tended to be item oriented. This orientation meant they would collect a song or story, give the place and date of the collection, and record minimal biographical information about the informant. They provided little data, however, on the social context of the item collected—the situation in which it was performed or practiced, the use made of it, the makeup of the audience for whom it was performed, its impact on the audience. In recent years, folklorists have shifted away from the study of items to the analysis of process—from the story told to the "telling" of the story. This shift has required a corresponding change in what is collected. Folklorists, including our student collectors, still collect folklore items, but they now surround those items with as much social and cultural context as possible in order to give a fuller, more dynamic picture of the lore in actual life.

Archiving

For many years, the materials brought in by this second wave of collectors, by both professors and students, were stuffed into boxes and filing cabinets in the professors' offices—the result being that, even though an adequate Mormon folklore data base was coming into being, it was still not available for scholarly analysis. General readers may find it interesting to know how this circumstance has gradually changed.

When I left Brigham Young University in 1978 to direct the folklore program at Utah State University, I offered to give the BYU library copies of the student collections in my office if the library would do the photocopying. The library accepted my offer; I took the originals to USU and left the copies behind. At USU, I discovered that the magnificent Fife collections—manuscripts, audio recordings, and color slides—resulting from more than forty years of field research were housed in the university library but were not generally available to researchers. We managed to secure a special room in the library, name it the Fife Folklore Archive, house both the Fifes' personal collections and the student-based collections there, and for the first time open both for public use. Under the able direction of Barbara Walker, the archive has continued to develop into one of the best in the country.[13]

As I prepared to return to BYU in 1984, I once again began photocopying, this time the student collections that had been submitted during my years at USU. The process lasted nearly a year. Upon arriving at BYU, I retrieved the earlier student collections from the corner of the library where they had been gathering dust in my absence, combined them with the photocopied USU collections I had brought with me, secured a library room, and made these collections available for scholarly use. Thus the student collections on file at both the USU and BYU archives contain identical materials to 1984; since then, each archive has developed in its own direction. During these same years, Jan Brunvand and Margaret Brady at the University of Utah turned the student collections crowding their offices over to their university library. As a result of these efforts, three research archives

now exist in Utah: the Fife Folklore Archive, located in the Merrill Library at Utah State University; the University of Utah Folklore Archive, located in the Marriott Library; and the Brigham Young University Folklore Archive, located in the Lee Library. All three of these archives contain significant amounts of Mormon materials.

An additional archive, the Utah Folk Arts Program Folklore Archive, is located at the Chase Home in Salt Lake City's Liberty Park. The Folk Arts Program, following its public-service mandate, brings together materials more for exhibits and performances than for scholarly analysis. However, since good public presentations must be based on equally good documentation and field research, the Folk Arts Program has collected considerable data useful to the scholar. For example, its impressive color-slide collection of Utah gravestone art will provide valuable insights into Mormon cultural and spiritual values.

Elsewhere, a smattering of Mormon folklore has made its way into archives all across the country, as university students have collected from Mormons they have encountered in the field. The best collection outside Utah is located at the Folklore and Mythology Center at the University of California at Los Angeles. The past director of the center, Wayland D. Hand, now deceased, was also a strong supporter of Mormon folklore collection and study in Utah.

Potential folklore archive users should be aware of how these repositories are like and unlike other archives containing Mormon materials. The special features of folklore archives grow out of the characteristics of folklore discussed above. These need further elaboration here.

First, like archives in general, folklore archives provide space where materials can accumulate until a sufficient data base is available to warrant sound generalizations. The archives thus provide an effective countermeasure against those who would jump to quick and easy conclusions on the basis of only a few texts. One occurrence of the story of the child saved from an irrigation canal cannot guide us to safe conclusions about its importance as a mirror of Mormon spiritual values; but the numerous versions of the story in various archives, attached to different temples and existing over a period of years, can help us better understand the

importance of temple activity in Mormon life. Similarly, one or two stories describing relations between Mormon settlers and the original occupants of the land, though possibly striking accounts valuable for their own sakes, will teach us little about Mormon attitudes toward Native Americans and will scarcely prove or disprove generalizations like those drawn above; but a thousand such accounts available to the scholar in archives will make defensible conclusions possible. Also, good contextual background data accompanying these accounts will make the conclusions still more convincing.

Second, like other archives, the folklore archives contain a wealth of material describing the pioneer past. Unlike these other repositories, however, the folklore archives will not greatly increase our understanding of that past. This is so for two reasons already discussed above. Stories generated and circulated about past events such as the practice of polygamy were not collected during the time the events were taking place. In addition, because people tell stories about the past in terms meaningful to them in the present, stories that did originate during the pioneer era and have remained in circulation through our day will have been reshaped during the frequent tellings and retellings to reflect the attitudes and meet the needs of the present tellers. Though describing pioneer happenings, the stories will speak to us most clearly of the contemporary Mormon world.

As we study stories that have been born in the past but live in the present, we may occasionally pick up a thin residue of truth about that past. But, of first importance, we will discover how contemporary Mormons have, through their stories, constructed the past in order to negotiate their way through the present. Consider the following polygamy story:

> This is just a story I heard once about three wives who were helping their husband push a new piano up the hill. They stopped to rest for a moment at the top of the hill and the husband said, "You know, this piano will belong to Martha." "What about us?" the other two said. "No," said the husband, "it's for Martha alone." So the two wives jumped up, pushed the piano down the hill, and watched it bust into a thousand pieces.[14]

Many contemporary Mormon women, almost always the narrators of such stories, identify with the piano-busters in this account and cheer their victory over the crass and unfeeling husband. Whatever the practice of polygamy was actually like, few Mormon women today contemplate its practice with pleasure. Though humorous on the surface, this story captures some of the pain of these modern storytellers and, at least vicariously, satisfies their need for justice. When I asked one woman why she liked the story, she replied, "Because they [the husband and the favored wife] got what they deserved."

Other narratives cast polygamy in a more favorable light and reflect a more positive attitude toward it. The point to remember is that the picture of polygamy, or of any other historical event emerging from the narratives in the archives, will be a picture drawn by contemporary Mormons. Because people are motivated not by what actually happened in the past, but by what they believe happened, learning what contemporary Mormons believe about events in Church history will help us better understand the forces that move them to action.

In addition to making available the data that will help us understand these motivating forces, the folklore archives will provide future scholars an opportunity denied us in our study of the Mormon past: the archives will preserve the folk narratives circulating today and will thus help future scholars understand our time from the perspective of stories told during our time.

Third, unlike other repositories of unpublished data, folklore archives seldom contain completed or closed collections. If a traditional research archive receives the papers of a prominent figure or the diaries and letters of an ordinary individual, once those papers have been indexed they are closed—new material is not usually added to them. Folklore collections, on the other hand, are open-ended—and this is their strength. As new variants of the irrigation-canal story are recorded or new accounts of appearances of the Three Nephites are collected, they are added to the existing files, expanding all the while our understanding of the stories and of the Mormon life they reflect. Examining the ever-changing nature of the folklore collections, therefore, is an excellent means of keeping a finger on the Mormon pulse.

Further, folklore archives help us measure that pulse across time. For instance, tracing changes in the Nephite stories over the fifty-year period they have been collected will help us understand changes taking place in the Church during that same period.[15] An extended example from the folklore of Mormon missionaries[16] will help illustrate this point.

Most of the stories told of divine intervention in the lives of missionaries have to do with supernatural assistance in preaching the gospel or supernatural protection from physical harm. The following story, known worldwide, illustrates the supernatural protection:

> This story happened when two missionaries were in a tough neighborhood somewhere in Australia. They came out of the apartment in the rough part of town, and there were at least thirty-five people standing around their car with chains, clubs, and knives. The missionaries looked at each other and asked if they should go inside and call the police, go outside and handle the crowd, or just fake it and just walk right in and hope nothing happens. [In many versions the missionaries pray for help.]
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> Well, they decided on the latter, and so they walked right through the crowd and opened the car door. They started up the car and drove away. When the car started, the crowd jumped back and scratched their heads. The missionaries drove away and didn't understand what had happened.
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> They drove some twenty miles, checked in with some missionaries for the evening and returned to their car a few moments later and found it would not start. On opening the hood, they found that there was no battery. The battery was back with the mob which had apparently removed it to keep the missionaries from leaving. No wonder they jumped back when the car started.[17]

Given the fact that missionaries face constant danger, they quite naturally tell stories like this one to reassure themselves that divine help is available in times of need. Such stories are legion. In the past, almost all these have been told about male missionaries, the elders. In recent years, however, a new story has emerged and swept the mission fields:

> These two sister missionaries were out tracting [going from door to door] one day, and they came onto this deserted house, and they didn't know this but the guy living in there had escaped from prison. He was in prison for killing women, and the women he had

killed were right there in the 21–23 age group. Well, they knocked and he wasn't interested, so they went on their way.

Well, they saw a flyer or something that showed his picture and said that he was wanted, so they turned him in and identified him. And when he was taken into the police department they asked him why he hadn't killed those two girls that had come tracting, because they were just the age group that he was always killing.

And he said that there was no way that he was going to even touch those girls because they had three big guys with swords standing behind them. So he just wanted to get rid of them as quickly as possible because those three big guys with swords would have killed him if he had touched the girls.[18]

The sisters' protectors, whom they never see themselves, are generally thought to be the Three Nephites, though sometimes they are simply called angels or divine personages. Of the thirty-seven versions of this story in the BYU Folklore Archive, the earliest was collected in 1985. In none of the accounts was the action described thought to have occurred before 1980. What we have here is a good example of narratives mirroring changes occurring in the surrounding society—as more and more women have entered the mission field, they, quite naturally, have become subjects of missionary lore.

But the lore does more than simply catalog the fact that the number of sister missionaries is increasing. Since far more elders than sisters still serve missions, one would expect more of the collected versions of this story to have come from males. Instead, twenty-four of the thirty-seven accounts were collected from women, suggesting that this is a narrative especially meaningful to them. Sister missionaries know that because they cannot hold the priesthood held by the male elders and because they have not been encouraged to serve missions as strongly as the elders have, they will sometimes be scorned and held in less regard as missionaries than are the elders. When elders do tell this story, they again stress the possibility of divine protection in the face of danger. Sisters stress the same possibility, but some of them also see in the story a validation of their roles as missionaries. One of them said, "Since it specifically concerned sisters, [it] helped calm some of my fears. The fact that the story was about sisters instead of elders showed

me that the Lord was just as concerned about the few as the many."[19] Another said that the mission president's wife had told her the story to remind her "that God protects sisters, as well as the elders."[20] If sisters and elders were held in equal regard, such a reminder would, of course, not be necessary.

As the story has moved from the sisters' to the elders' domain, the Nephite warriors have disappeared:

> There were two missionaries tracting one day. They knocked on the door of one gentleman's house who appeared to be interested and invited them in. The man was very hospitable and asked the two elders to sit down for a moment while he fetched them a glass of milk. The man served the milk and one elder attempted to take a drink. The elder felt some sort of distinct restraining force, like an invisible hand, holding back the glass of milk so that he could not bring it to his lips. The elder was quite alarmed and felt very strongly they should leave. Though they felt awkward, the two missionaries politely excused themselves and left. The man looked perplexed but made no objection. Later that day the missionaries happened to pass the police station and were shocked to see the picture of the same man on a "wanted" poster. The poster claimed that the man was being sought for repeated murders which he had committed by giving people poisoned milk.[21]

The elders in this account are saved by divine intervention. Still, they tend to rely on inner strength and inspiration rather than on external beings, as the sisters do. Indeed, as I spoke to a class on this topic recently, one young man, a former missionary, said that the elders in his mission told the story of the sister missionaries derisively—to make fun of sisters for not being able to take care of themselves without Nephites coming to their aid.

Hopefully this is an isolated response. Whatever the case, the story emerging here, as new material is constantly added to the open-ended missionary collection, is typical of stories emerging in folklore archives across the full spectrum of Mormon cultural life. As changes in the missionary system continue to occur, influencing gender roles and sometimes inspiring gender conflicts, missionary lore accumulating in folklore archives will remain a sensitive indicator of missionary attitudes and beliefs, helping us take the pulse of missionary life. Similarly, as changes occur in the larger Church,

the full range of Mormon folklore accumulating in folklore archives will help us keep our fingers on the pulse of Mormon life.

Indexing

One of the most difficult tasks in making Mormon folklore available for research is to develop indexing systems that will make open-ended archive collections accessible. For several years, Barbara Walker of the Fife Folklore Archive and I have been working on such a system. Ann Reichman at the Marriott Library has begun applying the same system to materials in the University of Utah Folklore Archive. Our hope is to enable a researcher to find the same set of data at all three of our archives with relative ease. To achieve this end, we have developed a hierarchical system that simply divides data into smaller and smaller thematic units and then moves to individual stories within these units—the irrigation-canal story, for example—and finally to variants of that story.

A brief look at our large legend collections will illustrate the method. We have broken data contained in many volumes of legends into the following thematic divisions: (1) Supernatural Religious, (2) Supernatural Non-Religious (ghost stories), (3) Human Conditions, (4) Character, (5) Etiological, and (6) Urban. Most Mormon legends occur in division 1, stories of divine intercession in human affairs; division 3, stories of recurring human situations such as migration (for example, the trek West) or marriage (for example, polygamy); division 4, stories of extraordinary characters in Church history; and division 5, Mormon place-name stories.

Let us trace our irrigation-canal story through the system. The story clearly falls into the first thematic division, "Supernatural Religious" legends. That division, in turn, can be subdivided into further thematic divisions:

1. Appearances or manifestations of supernatural beings
2. Unsolicited divine intervention
3. Solicited divine intervention

   Plus nine further divisions.

Our story falls under "Appearances or manifestations of supernatural beings," which can be further subdivided:

1. Deity, dead prophets, saints, prominent figures
2. Dead family members or friends
3. Unknown beings
4. Malevolent beings.

The woman who saves the child in the story is unknown to the family, so the story falls under the third category, "Unknown beings," which can again be subdivided, this time according to reasons for the appearance:

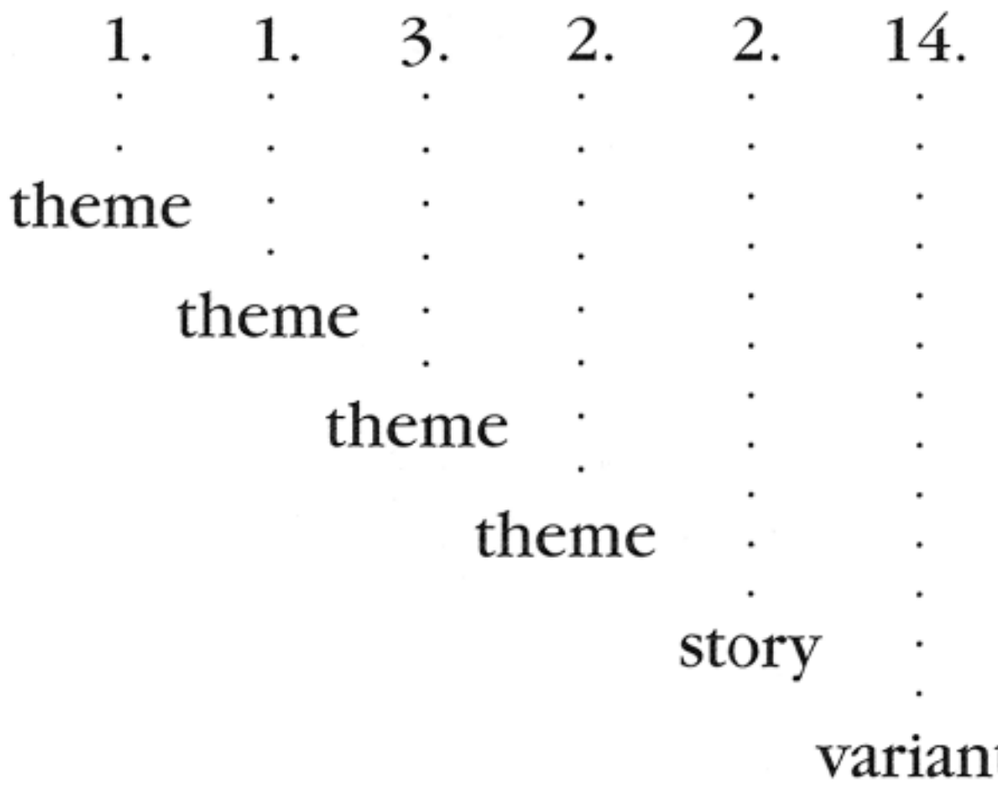
1. Comfort
2. Protect or aid
3. Urge or cause change in behavior

Plus seven further divisions.

Because the woman saves the child from drowning, the story falls under the second division, "Protect or aid"; it is the second of twenty-four separate stories in the division, and the version given at the beginning of this paper is the fourteenth variant. Charted, it would appear this way:

1. Supernatural Religious Legends
    1. Appearances or manifestations of supernatural beings
        3. Unknown beings
            2. Protect or aid
                2. Child saved from drowning by person for whom parent has performed temple work
                    14. variant number.

The index number for the story would thus be 1.1.3.2.2.14. This number is derived from these categories:



The benefit of this system is its open-endedness—new material can be worked in constantly without restructuring the basic index. The 335th variant of the irrigation-canal story submitted to the archive would simply be placed in the proper file following the 334th. Should so many variants be collected that they begin to break into subtypes, the thematic division to which the stories belong would be further subdivided without affecting the rest of the index. The index can thus be infinitely expanded to accommodate and manage an ever-growing body of Mormon folklore.

In the final analysis, a good index is much more than just an information retrieval system. By identifying major themes in Mormon folklore and by including under these themes stories that are similar to each other and by excluding those that are not, the archivist identifies corresponding themes and emphases in Mormon cultural life and moves the researcher a step closer to interpretation.

Such study and interpretation should make clear that Mormon folklore not only expresses the needs and aspirations of Mormons, it also reveals their essential humanity and, properly understood, can help us better understand both Mormon and universal human strivings. The folklore archives provide a record of those strivings.

Editor's note: These collections are accessible to interested and qualified readers at the libraries that house them. Knowing how these collections are organized and indexed will hopefully help readers understand how to access these resources. These archives are constantly expanding. People all over the world are

invited to submit stories that have become meaningful parts of their experiences as Latter-day Saints. A submission form for use in adding stories to the Brigham Young University Folklore Archives is available at 4069 HBLL, Provo, Utah 84602.

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NOTES

[1] For general introductions to folklore, see Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction,* 3d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986); Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979); and Elliott Oring, *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1986).

[2] Collected by Steven C. Walker in 1964. Brigham Young University Folklore Archive [hereafter BYUFA]: L3.5.2.2.6.1.

[3] Collected by Susan Christensen and Doris Blackham in 1971. BYUFA: L3.2.1.5.2.2.1.

[4] For more on the relation of folklore to history, see Brynjulf Alver, "Historical Legends and Historical Truth," in *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies,* ed. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 137–49; Seppo Knuuttila, "What the People of Sivakka Tell about Themselves: A Research Experiment in Folk History," in *Studies in Oral Narrative,* ed. Anna-Leena Siikala, *Studia Fennica* 33 (1989): 111–26; and William A. Wilson, "Folklore and History: Fact amid the Legends," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 41 (Winter 1973): 40–58.

[5] See Jessie L. Embry's "Oral History Programs of the Charles Redd Center for Western History, Brigham Young University," in *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States,* ed. David J. Whittaker, forthcoming. For more on the distinction between folklore and oral history, see William A. Wilson, "Mormon Folklore and History: Implications for Canadian Research," in *The Mormon Presence in Canada,* ed. Brigham Y. Card and others (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press; Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990), 150–66.

[6] Collected by Kathryn Wright in 1975. BYUFA: L1.1.3.2.2.17.

[7] For an overview of the development of Mormon folklore study, see William A. Wilson, "The Study of Mormon Folklore," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 (Fall 1976): 317–28.

[8] For the results of these efforts, see Lester A. Hubbard, *Ballads and Songs from Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1961); Thomas E. Cheney, *Mormon Songs from the Rocky Mountains: A Compilation of Mormon*

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[9] For examples of changed emphases in the works of these and other contemporary scholars, see William A. Wilson, "The Paradox of Mormon Folklore," *BYU Studies* 17 (Autumn 1976): 40–58; William A. Wilson, "Mormon Folklore," in *Handbook of American Folklore,* ed. Richard M. Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 155–61; William A. Wilson, "The Study of Mormon Folklore: An Uncertain Mirror for Truth," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22 (Winter 1989): 95–110; George H. Schoemaker, "Made in Heaven: Marriage Confirmation Narratives among Mormons," *Northwest Folklore* 7, no. 2 (Spring 1989): 38–53; Margaret K. Brady "Transformations of Power: Mormon Women's Visionary Narratives," *Journal of American Folklore* 100 (October–December 1987): 461–68; Carolyn Flatley Gilkey, "Mormon Testimony Meeting: Some Aspects of a Narrating Event," *Southwest Folklore* 3 (Fall 1979): 45–59; Clifton Holt Jolley, "The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith: An Archetypal Study," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 (Fall 1976): 329–50; Ellen E. McHale, "'Witnessing for Christ': The Hill Cumorah Pageant of Palmyra, New York," *Western Folklore* 44 (January 1985): 34–40; Susan Peterson, "The Great and Dreadful Day: Mormon Folklore of the Apocalypse," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 (Fall 1976): 365–78; Richard C. Poulsen, "Fate and the Persecutors of Joseph Smith: Transmutations of an American Myth," *Dialogue* 11 (Winter 1978): 63–70; Wayland D. Hand, "Magic and the Supernatural in Utah Folklore," *Dialogue* 16 (Winter 1983): 51–64; and Barre Toelken, "Traditional Water Narratives in Utah," *Western Folklore* 50 (April 1991): 191–200.

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[10] See William I. Kaufman, with Thomas E. Cheney and Richard P. Condie, *The Mormon Pioneer Songbook* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Theodore Presser, 1980); Jan Harold Brunvand, "As the Saints Go Marching By: Modern Jokelore Concerning Mormons," *Journal of American Folklore* 83 (January–March 1970): 53–60; Thomas E. Cheney, *The Golden Legacy: A Folk History of J. Golden Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Peregrine-Smith, 1973); William A. Wilson, "The Seriousness of Mormon Humor," *Sunstone* 10, no. 1 (1985): 6–13; Barbara Bosen, "Danish Stories from Ephraim," *AFF word* 2 (Fall 1972): 24–34; and William A. Wilson and John B. Harris, "And They Spake with a New Tongue (On Missionary Slang)," in *Conference on the Language of Mormons,* ed. Harold S. Madsen and John L. Sorenson (Provo: Brigham Young University Language Research Center, 1974), 46–48.

[11] See Davis Bitton, "The Ritualization of Mormon History," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Winter 1975): 67–85; *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from*

Utah, collected by Anthon S. Cannon and others, ed. Wayland D. Hand and Jeannine E. Talley (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984); and Suzanne Volmar Riches, "Threads through a Patchwork Quilt: The Wedding Shower as a Communication Ritual and Rite of Passage for the Mormon Woman" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1987).

[12] See Austin E. Fife, "Stone Houses of Northern Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 40 (Winter 1972): 6–23; Ann Hitchock, "Gods, Graves, and Historical Archaeologists: A Study of a Mormon Cemetery in Tucson," *AFF word* 1 (January 1972): 11–16; Jan Harold Brunvand, "The Architecture of Zion," *The American West* 13 (March–April 1976): 28–35; Hal Cannon, ed., *Utah Folk Art: A Catalog of Material Culture* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1980); Hal Cannon, *The Grand Beehive* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1980); Thomas Carter, "Building Zion: Folk Architecture in the Mormon Settlements of Utah's Sanpete Valley, 1849–1890" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1984); and Richard C. Poulsen, *The Pure Experience of Order: Essays on the Symbolic in the Folk Culture of Western America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982).

[13] See William A. Wilson, "USU Fife Folklore Archive," *Folklore Society of Utah Newsletter* 17 (Autumn 1983): 2–3.

[14] Collected by Peggy Hansen in 1971. BYUFA: Collection #253, no. 26.

[15] See, for example, William A. Willson, "Freeways, Parking Lots and Ice Cream Stands: The Three Nephites in Contemporary Mormon Culture," *Dialogue* 21 (Autumn 1988): 13–26.

[16] For an overview of Mormon missionary folklore, see William A. Wilson, *On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries,* Utah State University Faculty Honor Lecture (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1981).

[17] Collected by Tiare Fullmer in 1981. BYUFA: HWC5.2.3.5.12.

[18] Collected by Jane England in 1990. BYUFA: HWC5.2.3.12.2.

[19] Collected by Laura Andersen in 1990. BYUFA: HWC5.2.3.12.18.

[20] Collected by Rhonda Jones in 1992. BYUFA: HWC5.2.3.12.14.

[21] Collected by Joshua D. Heiner in 1992. BYUFA: HWC5.2.8.1.4.