

*Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black*



## PREFACE

**R**EADERS might wonder why we, as editors, chose the lead title *Banner of the Gospel*. William W. Phelps coined this nickname for Wilford Woodruff in a letter written on Christmas Day 1844 to William Smith. In the letter Phelps characterizes each member of the Twelve, including William, with a moniker:

I know the Twelve, and they know me. Their names are Brigham Young, the lion of the Lord; Heber C. Kimball, the herald of grace; Parley P. Pratt, the archer of paradise; Orson Hyde, the olive branch of Israel; Willard Richards, the keeper of the rolls; John Taylor, the champion of right; William Smith, the patriarchal Jacob staff; *Wilford Woodruff, the banner of the gospel*; George A. Smith, the entablature of truth; Orson Pratt, the gauge of philosophy; John E. Page, the sun dial; and Lyman Wight, the wild ram of the mountain. And they are good men; the best the Lord can find; they do the will of God, and the saints know it.<sup>1</sup>

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What did Phelps mean when he described Wilford Woodruff as the “banner of the gospel”? Simply put, Elder Woodruff stood out as one of the premier ensigns of the gospel—one whose life exemplified what the Restoration was all about. In an 1845 letter to his father, Woodruff wrote of his commitment to Mormonism: “I am overwhelmed as it were with Mormonism for it is my life, meat, and drink and I do not expect to be anything else but a Mormon either in life or death.”<sup>2</sup> A man of diversity—miller, farmer, outdoorsman, rancher, horticulturist, diarist, educator, and civic leader—he complemented these skills with deep faith and religious devotion as a missionary, Apostle, Church historian, temple president, and President of the Church. Through his inspired leadership and direction, Woodruff helped bring about accommodation and change, leading the Church into the social, cultural, and religious mainstream of society. Thomas G. Alexander, one of Woodruff’s biographers, observed:

He is arguably the third most important figure in all of LDS church history after Joseph Smith, who began Mormonism, and Brigham Young, who led the Saints to Utah and supervised the early colonization of the intermountain west. . . .

Relatively well-educated, well-read, and well-traveled, Woodruff combined a creative mind, practical inventiveness, and physical vigor with a sense of personal piety unsurpassed by any nineteenth-century leader. Woodruff blended formally educated but rough-hewn intellectual gifts . . . [and] a firm dependence on inspiration . . . with a strong sense of personal destiny and Providential protection. . . .

This unique combination of temporal shrewdness and spiritual insight dwelled in a mind and body absolutely

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committed to Mormonism and unquestioningly loyal to his colleagues and to the Saints.<sup>3</sup>

The essays in this work were selected from the papers and presentations given at the “Wilford Woodruff: Missionary, Apostle, Church President” Symposium held at the BYU Conference Center on October 12, 2007, in commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of Woodruff’s birth. The event was sponsored by the BYU Religious Studies Center, the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, and the Wilford Woodruff Family Association. Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black of the Department of Church History and Doctrine at BYU were cochairs of the symposium.<sup>4</sup> A second symposium, held on November 20, 2007, was sponsored by the Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut. Following the two symposia, Jason E. Thompson submitted to us a historical paper on Woodruff’s mission to Maine and the Fox Islands. After reviewing his manuscript, we chose to include his essay, “‘The Lord Told Me to Go and I Went’: Wilford Woodruff’s Missions to the Fox Islands, 1837–38,” as part of the compilation. To round out the book, an extensive chronology highlighting major events associated with Woodruff’s life was added.

We express appreciation to the following individuals for their contributions and support: Thomas G. Alexander, Terry B. Ball, Richard E. Bennett, Robert S. Clark, Jacob F. Frandsen, Cynthia Doxey Green, Scott C. Esplin, Arnold K. Garr, Alonzo L. Gaskill, Kristie Guynn, Steven C. Harper, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, Michael L. Hutchings, Kent P. Jackson, R. Devan Jensen, Christopher C. Jones, Larry R. King, Richard N. W. Lambert, R. Scott Lloyd, Craig K. Manscill, Kenneth R. Mays, Laurie Mildenhall, Reid L. Neilson, Brent R. Nordgren, Jonathan R. Owen, Jennifer Price, Matthew O. Richardson, Patty A.

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Smith, Earle L. Stone, Jason E. Thompson, Jeffrey M. Wade, Jeffrey N. Walker, Kim R. Wilson, W. Bruce Woodruff, Fred E. Woods, and Dennis A. Wright.

NOTES

1. William W. Phelps to William Smith, December 25, 1844, in the *Times and Seasons*, January 1, 1845, 761; emphasis added. Note: The January 1 issue of the *Times and Seasons* is incorrectly dated 1844 instead of 1845.
2. Wilford Woodruff to Aphek Woodruff, April 18, 1845, as cited in Dean C. Jessee, “Wilford Woodruff,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992): 4:1,583.
3. Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 331–32.
4. See R. Scott Lloyd, “Scholars Discuss Wilford Woodruff,” *Church News*, October 20, 2007, 7, 10; and Kristie Guynn, “Bicentenary,” *Church News*, November 24, 2007, 6.