

Kenneth L. Alford

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BEN E. RICH:
SHARING THE GOSPEL CREATIVELY

BENJAMIN Erastus Rich was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on November 7, 1855—one of fifty-two children of Apostle Charles C. Rich. His father was at San Bernardino, California, managing Church affairs and contending with local apostasy when Ben was born.¹ Ben would spend many of his early years without his father’s presence since Church responsibilities frequently required Elder Rich to travel for extended periods.

One of the earliest events recorded about Ben’s life occurred while his father was serving a mission in Great Britain. Ben and several of his young friends were playing marbles on the street in downtown Salt Lake City near the Tithing Office. Ben looked like a street urchin—barefoot and wearing a hat with a hole in it, with “ragged trousers and a worn out shirt.”² A distinguished-looking man stopped and asked his name. He replied:

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“My name is Ben E. Rich.” “Where is your father?” “My father is in England on a mission.” “Well, my boy, I want you to come with me.” The boy said: “Now, what have I done?” “You haven’t been doing anything, but I want to do something nice for you.” “Well, if you will wait until I finish this game, I will go with you,” and so the gentleman waited until the game was over and took the young man up the street. He said, “I’m going to take you into my store.” Young Ben replied: “Well, the stores are down the street,” pointing to Main Street. “Yes, I know, but I have one up here,” the gentleman said, and took him in a building through the Eagle Gate and informed the man in charge: “I want you to fit out this young man with new shoes and stockings and a new suit of clothes, a shirt and a hat, that will fit him, and give him an extra shirt, two suits of underwear and an extra pair of stockings.” He said: “Now, young man this gentleman will fix you up so that you will be the best dressed boy in Salt Lake City, and I want you to go home and take your bundle with you and tell your mother that you ran across Brother Brigham.”³

In light of the numerous and varied publications he would produce later in life, it is surprising to learn that Ben E. Rich received little formal education as a child. As he once explained, “My school days ended when I was a child of twelve years and when my parents lived a thousand miles from civilization and opportunities for gathering knowledge were not as they are now. I remember in some of the classes in the school which I attended we had to pass a book from the head to the foot of the class, taking turns in reading it. . . . I doubt very much if I could pass the fourth grade if I were to take an examination in the schools of today.”⁴

As an adult, Ben E. Rich was described as being “nearly six feet tall, erect, with a graceful carriage. He had a handsome face, fine forehead, dark, kindly eyes, a classical nose, a firm jaw, a happy smile, a hearty laugh, and was blessed with a musical voice. He was one of the most eloquent preachers of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His voice had unusual carrying power, and its friendly tone always commanded respect and

attention. At open-air meetings in the large cities of the mission field he would gather throngs about him in the course of a few minutes.”⁵

EARLY MARRIED LIFE

In 1877, Ben E. Rich married Diane Farr, the daughter of Lorin Farr (a prominent Church and civic leader in Ogden, Utah).⁶ In 1909, on the occasion of their thirty-second wedding anniversary, Ben wrote that she “has been an anchor of hope and a harbor of safety all my life. . . . I sometimes shudder at what might have been my fate had I never met her, and God knows how often I have praised his holy name for sending her to me. She has always been the light of my soul, the life of my creation, and the strength of my heartstrings. No better, no truer, no more devoted, and no more noble wife has God ever given to man. As a heavenly queen of a wife, so has she been as a mother. . . . Her faith in God was only equaled by her ambition to see her children good and great. . . . Thank God she is by my side tonight.”⁷

His marriage made him the brother-in-law of John Henry Smith (son of pioneer Apostle George A. Smith), who was called as an Apostle in 1880 and later served as a counselor to President Joseph F. Smith. Ben and Diane moved to Ogden in 1885 where he worked in a variety of jobs—ZCMI salesman, Ogden Equitable Cooperative Store manager, grocer, and insurance agent.⁸ He was also very active politically and helped to organize the Republican Party in Utah Territory as Utah approached statehood during the 1890s.⁹

After experiencing financial reverses in Utah, he moved to Rexburg, Idaho, in 1894, bought a small newspaper called the *Rexburg Press*, renamed it the *Silver Hammer*, and became the editor.¹⁰ Thus he gained writing and publishing skills that would serve him well in the future. He remained politically active and was appointed as a colonel and judge advocate general for the state of Idaho (even though he had no formal legal education or training). As such, he found himself being the only Republican on the staff of Governor Frank Steunenberg, a staunch Democrat.¹¹

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By all accounts, Ben E. Rich was charismatic and personable. Charles W. Nibley, one of the Presiding Bishops of the Church, said that he had a “sunny, genial nature, [a] love of humor and [a] tendency to look on the bright side of life.”¹² Ben was a close friend of Elder J. Golden Kimball, and “each said that the other was the most humerous [*sic*] speaker he had ever listened to.”¹³

MISSIONARY SERVICE

Ben E. Rich spent a large portion of his adult life in full-time missionary service. In 1880 he was called to serve in Great Britain for three years—leaving behind his growing family.¹⁴ On January 10, 1898, he was set apart as president of the Southern States Mission, with headquarters in Chattanooga, Tennessee.¹⁵ At that time there were only seven missions in the United States, and with boundaries that stretched from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes and from Texas to the Atlantic Ocean, the Southern States Mission was geographically the largest.¹⁶

In May 1902, at the suggestion of Ben E. Rich, the First Presidency organized the states of Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, West Virginia, and Ohio into the Middle States Mission and called Rich to serve as the first president. With mission headquarters in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Middle States Mission was short-lived. Upon the sudden death of Ephraim H. Nye, the Southern States Mission President, the following year, the Middle States Mission reunited with the Southern States Mission, and Ben E. Rich served, once again, as president.¹⁷ Missionary work in the Southern states was not without danger and confrontation, but Ben E. Rich managed to find humor in the midst of the challenges. Prior to visiting with the Saints in Yazoo, Mississippi, he was assured by a friend that the people there would meet him with open arms. He later telegraphed his friend, “They met me with arms all right, but they were the kind that shoot bullets.”¹⁸

While many of his mission experiences are worth sharing, this example will suffice. Frank Snow, son of President Lorenzo Snow, dreamed he was called on a mission to the Southern states. He further dreamed that he was

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in a large house in the South and saw President Ben E. Rich killed. President Snow declared that his son's dream was from the Lord, and he called Frank to serve in the Southern States Mission. A few months after being assigned to the Virginia Conference, Elder Snow and his companion were busy making preparations for a local Church conference. As they walked along a street, one home attracted Elder Snow's attention, and he told his companion, "I've seen that house before, and I am going in there." After meeting the homeowners, he told them that he had seen them before in a dream. The owners informed Elder Snow that President Ben E. Rich was scheduled to stay in their home that night, but Elder Snow emphatically told them that the mission president would not be staying with them. After speaking with Elder Snow, President Rich made other sleeping arrangements. The following day "it was learned that a mob had surrounded the house in the night. . . . It was also learned that it was the intention of the mob to take President Rich and beat him and probably kill him."¹⁹

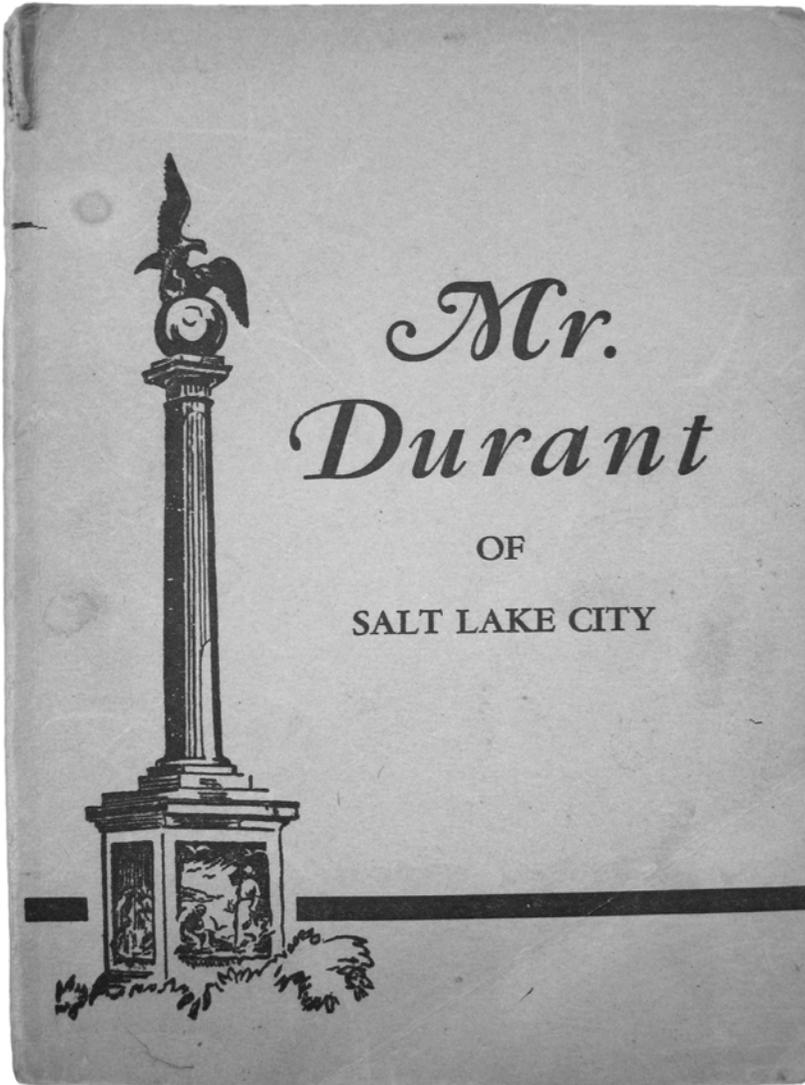
Ben E. Rich was released as president of the Southern States Mission in July 1908, but he was immediately called to serve as president of the Eastern States Mission, which was headquartered in New York City. He served faithfully for five years and was released by his death there in 1913.

CREATIVELY SHARING THE GOSPEL

Having worked in a variety of vocations during his early adult life, Ben E. Rich successfully applied skills he had gained from each toward missionary service. Here are a few examples of how he creatively expanded and extended missionary work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Debates. Public debates were a popular form of entertainment, and Ben E. Rich was a masterful debater. William E. Borah, who served several terms as a United States senator from Idaho, once stated that "he [Ben E. Rich] was one of the most eloquent speakers he had ever heard; that he always had his audience with him, and his fund of humor and anecdotes made a most happy

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Written by Ben E. Rich in 1893, Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City, “That Mormon,” became a best-selling proselyting tool—translated into numerous languages, it was re-printed for the next sixty years.

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impression upon [his] audience; that he had never seen Mr. Rich at a disadvantage from questions propounded from an audience or from hecklers; [and] that he was one of the most resourceful debaters he had ever known.”²⁰

Ben E. Rich was first invited to represent the Church in a public debate in 1883 shortly after returning from his British mission. For two consecutive evenings in May at the old Ogden Tabernacle, he debated the Reverend Richard Hartley, pastor of the Ogden City Baptist Church.²¹ Dr. A. S. Condon, a physician and non-Mormon friend of Reverend Hartley’s, reported that “he attended the first meeting feeling sorry for the uneducated young Mormon Elder, but it was not an hour before he was sorry for his friend, Reverend Hartley; that he had never heard such an eloquent preacher as Elder Rich” and that his friend was “no match for Ben E. Rich.”²² Ben E. Rich recognized, though, that a transcript of the debate could have a longer and wider impact than the debate itself. He published the debate in pamphlet form and made it available for purchase.²³ There are contemporary reports that copies of the Rich-Hartley Debate even reached Polynesia.²⁴

Similarly, he published other debates in the years that followed. For five nights (March 4–8, 1912) in Fairmont, West Virginia, for example, President Rich publicly debated A. A. Brunner of the Church of Christ on the topic of whether or not “John the Baptist and Jesus Christ were the last Prophets sent by God, and that the Bible as given to us by Christ and the Apostles in Palestine is sufficient to guide men and women to salvation from sin.”²⁵ Following the 1912 debate, a 172-page transcript of the debate series was published by the Eastern States Mission and was made available for purchase across the nation.²⁶ It was reported that during his service as a mission president “he met and debated with many Christian gentlemen of prominence. Always he left a strong impression upon his listeners and opponents. Always he was a fearless expounder of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”²⁷ Transcripts of his debates are still available today on the Internet.

Mr. Durant. Ben E. Rich took his missionary experiences and turned them into an easy-to-read, conversational book entitled *Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City, “That Mormon.”* In the preface of the 1893 first edition,

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Ben E. Rich explained that he wrote the book in an endeavor “to present, in plain and simple words, the faith of the Latter-day Saints, with a desire to aid and interest the young men of Mormondom, who have had no missionary experience, and fit them to make known their belief to the nations of the earth, should they be called upon for that purpose.”²⁸

Mr. Durant was designed to help give all readers “a better conception of the Latter-day Saints and their religion.”²⁹ Written in the style of a short novel, *Mr. Durant* introduced readers to a welcoming boarding house in the small town of Westminster, Tennessee, and the variety of characters who were there—primarily, Mr. Marshall, the proprietor; and four guests: Mr. Brown, a lawyer; Mr. Slocum, a physician; Mr. Fitzallen, a traveling clergyman; and Mr. Durant, a Latter-day Saint “from the West.”³⁰ Much of the book is the dialogue that takes place as the characters sit on the boarding house’s veranda and explore religious truths. Through the pages of *Mr. Durant*, Ben E. Rich found a way to gently weave detailed explanations of gospel truths into an entertaining story. *Mr. Durant* became a Latter-day Saint best seller and key missionary tool, popular with both investigators and members. New editions of *Mr. Durant* were reprinted for sixty years, with the last edition being released in 1952. The book was also translated into numerous languages.

A Friendly Discussion. Following the initial and almost immediate success of *Mr. Durant*, Ben E. Rich saw an opportunity, as a newly serving mission president, to make the message of his book accessible to an even wider audience. Even though it was physically a small book, at over three hundred pages (the first edition also included almost forty pages of quotations from Brigham Young) *Mr. Durant* required more time to read than many potential readers were willing to invest. Therefore, in 1899, he produced a thirty-page abridged edition that retained the outline of the original story but focused more on the doctrines presented. Published by “the Missions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” and entitled *A Friendly Discussion*, this pamphlet-sized missionary tract quickly became the most popular missionary pamphlet in the history of the Church.³¹ Until 1906, when the Church purchased the copyright to both publications, the Southern States Mission printed and sold

both *A Friendly Discussion* and *Mr. Durant* to other missions throughout the world and used the revenue to support the Southern States Mission.³²

IN THE POLITICAL REALM

Ben E. Rich was politically active for most of his adult life and had a close and interesting relationship with President Theodore Roosevelt. Their association began in the fall of 1900, when Rich visited Idaho as part of a trip west to attend general conference. At a political rally held in Rexburg, Ben was invited to introduce Theodore Roosevelt, William McKinley's vice-presidential running mate. During his introduction, President Rich predicted that Roosevelt would become president of the United States. Roosevelt was so impressed by Rich that he invited him to accompany him that night in his private railcar back to Salt Lake City, and Rich gladly accepted: "Aboard the train, Theodore Roosevelt asked Mr. Rich to come into his bedroom quarters. Theodore had disrobed for the night and was in his pajamas and in his bed and asked Mr. Rich to explain all about the Mormon Religion to him. As the discussion progressed Theodore not only listened, but sat up in his bed and asked hundreds of questions. This interview lasted from Idaho Falls down past Cache Junction and took up nearly the entire night."³³ Ben E. Rich was chosen as the sole representative from Idaho to march in Theodore Roosevelt's inaugural parade.³⁴

In 1902, President Roosevelt visited Chattanooga, Tennessee (where Ben E. Rich was serving as mission president), and a parade was given in Roosevelt's honor. Ben E. Rich attended the parade and called out, "How do you do, Mr. President?" as President Roosevelt passed by. Recognizing Ben E. Rich in the crowd, President Roosevelt halted the parade and walked over to talk with Rich. The president "asked how he was getting along in his mission field and if there were any more mobbings of his Elders in the south."³⁵ At the end of their conversation, President Roosevelt said, "I think now by this recognition, you will have more friends in the South."³⁶ President Roosevelt remained a lifelong friend of both Ben E. Rich and the Church.³⁷

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TRAINING CHURCH LEADERS

Ben E. Rich recognized the importance of strengthening local Church leaders, and he worked constantly to mentor and inspire Church leaders who served within his mission. During his first year as mission president, he invited conference presidents within his mission to attend a mission-wide leadership conference in Chattanooga. On May 8–9, 1899, two of the Twelve Apostles (Elders Matthias F. Cowley and John Henry Smith), Ben E. Rich, his two counselors, and conference presidents from Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Florida, Kentucky, Virginia, and Louisiana gathered for instruction. It was the first time they had ever met together. During a similar leadership gathering in 1900, President Rich counseled his conference presidents to “find out what your Elders are teaching to the people of this land, and tell them not to dabble with the mysteries of godliness. . . . Be careful of your Elders. They must not carry money. They have not been sent out here to do as they please. If they will not obey counsel, report them to me for they can’t stay here in disobedience. Some years ago in this Mission the Elders used to carry blankets they were so afraid they would have to sleep out. Their faith was wrapped up in these blankets and they spent a great many of their nights in them also. It is just as wrong for a President to be slack in giving counsel, as it is for an Elder to be disobedient. Write more private letters and less Circulars. Push your Elders.”³⁸ Leadership conferences became a successful annual event.

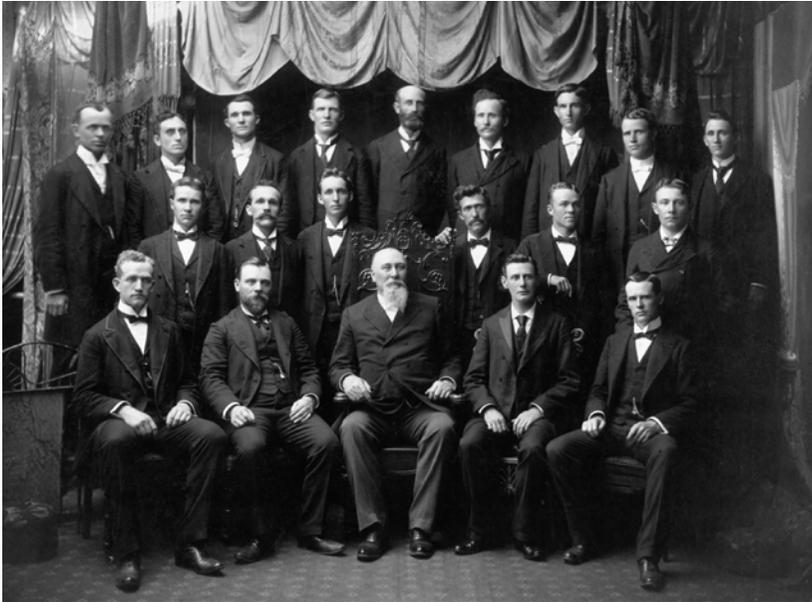
Traditionally, full-time missionaries held many important leadership positions within missions. In a major change designed to strengthen local Church leaders, Ben E. Rich “instituted the practice of installing local Saints in important branch positions, thus not only strengthening the branches, but also releasing the missionaries for other duties.”³⁹

TEACHING MISSIONARIES

Ben E. Rich also worked to strengthen the individual missionaries who served in his mission. Missionary work at the turn of the twentieth century

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was different than it is today. Missionaries frequently traveled without purse or scrip and were largely left to their own devices regarding how to proselyte. President Rich wrote and published *The Elders' Reference*—a set of guidelines and rules for his missionaries to follow—which can be viewed as an early forerunner of the *Preach My Gospel* publication that is widely used today.⁴⁰ *The Elders' Reference* included counsel on dozens of topics to help missionaries learn their duties and strengthen members. Missionaries were counseled on how to baptize, confirm, and ordain; administering the sacrament; missionary transfers; mission length; how they should conduct



The first annual meeting of the conference presidents in the Southern States Mission was held in Chattanooga, Tennessee, May 8–9, 1899. Front row (left to right): George A. Lyman, counselor to Ben E. Rich; Matthias F. Cowley, Apostle; John Henry Smith, Apostle; Ben E. Rich, mission president; Lewis R. Anderson, counselor to Ben E. Rich. Rows two and three: conference presidents from Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, Florida, Kentucky, South Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana. Courtesy of Church History Library.

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themselves; the importance of keeping a journal; what to do after being released; and many other subjects.

The first edition of *The Elders' Reference* helped to standardize missionary work within the Southern states. It concluded with counsel to missionaries that provides some insight into Ben E. Rich himself. He wrote that the Southern States Mission “has had many Presidents, some of whom have passed beyond the veil [*sic*], and others who are now laboring in other parts of the vineyard; but the Mission remains here, and its name does not change. Make the name of the Mission great; address your letters to it; have your loved ones at home do the same; have the Saints do likewise; advocate it, instead of the name of its President, because it remains always, so long as the Gospel shall be preached in these parts, while its President may not. Your Brother and Fellow Laborer, Ben E. Rich.”⁴¹

When President Rich published an updated edition of *The Elders' Reference* in the Eastern States Mission, the handbook had grown from twenty-four to sixty pages. In 1913 the *Improvement Era* noted that “it contains a sermon delivered by President Joseph F. Smith directed to elders going on missions, and containing practical suggestions to them, also a series of practical notes by President Francis M. Lyman of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles to be referred to daily by missionaries. There are several pages of practical instructions to the missionaries on the methods of performing their work . . . and many other practical points upon which elders need instruction. There are also daily hints to missionaries, and counsel to returning missionaries, by President Joseph F. Smith. . . . It is printed in handy form for pocket use.”⁴²

To supplement the annual Church leadership conferences, Ben E. Rich also instituted regional missionary meetings. During one such meeting, it was reported that President Rich “took a seat on the platform and at the conclusion of the first speaker’s remarks he addressed the meeting, talking to the Elders. He told them he knew of the discouragements and trials they had to endure, and counseled them not to forsake the faith, for it was the old faith, the same that the prophets and the disciples had held: that they were not having any harder time than those who had gone before them in the work.”⁴³

REACHING OUT TO CHURCH MEMBERS

President Rich continually looked for new ways to reach out to members. On July 31, 1909, for example, as he was leaving Chattanooga and becoming president of the Eastern States Mission, he sent a letter “to the Saints of the Eastern States Mission.” The four-page letter encouraged members within the mission to keep the commandments and to recognize that they were part of something much larger than the individual branches and conferences in which they labored.⁴⁴

At the turn of the century, it was not unusual for mission presidents to speak during the Church’s semiannual general conference, and beginning in April 1901, Ben E. Rich became a recurring and much-anticipated conference speaker. He was recognized for his humor, and several of his talks are annotated with the notation “[Laughter]” throughout his comments. Here is an April 1902 example: “The people of the south are a good people. As a rule, they are a religious people. They are not a hypocritical people. If they are your enemy, they let you know it. We have made some very strong and influential friends in the south; and, as is the case wherever the Gospel is preached, we have also made some very strong and influential enemies. I believe that I have three invitations there now to be killed, but I have been so busy that I have not had time to fill any of them yet.”⁴⁵

From April 1901 through April 1913, he spoke in general conference every year except 1907, and that year he gave a benediction during the October conference. During six of those years, he spoke in both the April and October conferences, and during two conferences (October 1908 and April 1909) he spoke more than once.⁴⁶ Part of his popularity as a conference speaker might also be attributed to his plainspoken style of teaching the gospel. As he noted during an overflow meeting during the October 1905 conference, “I know I am looked upon as very radical. In fact, it is said that brother Golden Kimball and myself swear once in a while. I think that if Jesus would come here He would express His opinion of some people in almost similar language to that used sometimes by Brother Golden Kimball.”⁴⁷

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CHURCH PUBLICATIONS

Ben E. Rich applied the skills he learned as a newspaper editor toward sharing the gospel and strengthening members and missionaries. For several years, Southern States Mission presidents considered publishing a regular mission newspaper,⁴⁸ but it was Ben E. Rich who actually did so. In December 1898, just a few months after arriving in Chattanooga as the new mission president, he published the first issue of the *Southern Star*—a mission-wide publication. In introducing the new publication, President Rich wrote, “We were impressed with the need of a paper in the Southern States Mission, that we might communicate to Saints, Elders and friends alike, the Gospel message. . . . If one soul can say that it learned from *The Southern Star* a truth that helped it to be present at the roll call of the Master, we will feel that our efforts have not been in vain.”⁴⁹

Issues of the *Southern Star*, published weekly for two years, were sold by subscription (\$1.50 annually). Each issue carried messages and talks from Church leaders, mission news, and articles to educate both Saints and non-members. Members and missionaries were actively encouraged to subscribe. A self-sustaining enterprise, it ceased publication in December 1900 when dwindling missionaries and reduced subscriptions showed it could soon become unprofitable.⁵⁰

When the Middle States Mission reunited with the Southern States Mission in 1903, President Rich desired once again to provide a regular mission publication. The *Elders' Journal*, a follow-up publication to the *Southern Star*, was published from 1903 to 1907.⁵¹ It served as a valuable resource for missionaries and members. Historians Arnold K. Garr and Clark V. Johnson noted that through the *Elders' Journal* “Ben E. Rich had accomplished something that no one else had ever done. He established a mission magazine in the United States that would not only endure but flourish. Before President Rich, the success rate of mission publications in the United States was not very impressive. Several very capable people, including John Taylor, George Q. Cannon, Parley and Orson Pratt, and Erastus Snow, attempted to establish periodicals in the American missions, but none of those publications

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remained in existence more than two years.⁵² By the time *The Elders' Journal* consolidated with *The Liabona*, however, it had already existed for four years and was thriving.⁵³ In 1907, the *Elders' Journal* was combined with the *Liabona*, a Central States Mission publication, to create *Liabona: The Elders' Journal*, which served for several decades “as a historical record for the missions of the Church in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.”⁵⁴

While serving as a mission president, Ben E. Rich gave numerous newspaper interviews. Some interviews, such as one given to the *Atlanta Constitution* in March 1899 (Georgia was reopened for missionary work in the spring of 1898), filled an entire page and provided ample opportunity to share the gospel and try to break down walls of prejudice against the Church and its members.⁵⁵ Ben E. Rich also found time, while serving as the president of three different missions, to edit and publish several faith-promoting books, including *Prophets and Patriarchs*, *The Blood of the Prophets*, *Cowley's Talks on Doctrine*, and a popular two-volume set entitled *Scrapbook of Mormon Literature*.⁵⁶

MISSIONARY POSTCARDS

Missionary pass-along cards are very popular today. Ben E. Rich didn't develop pass-along cards, but he created something similar that performed the same role. Starting around 1907, he printed a series of hand-lettered postcards (sometimes referred to as “motto cards”) with various quotations and sayings on the front.⁵⁷ Each postcard was numbered and contained a single quotation. Cards were offered for sale as a way to raise much-needed mission funds. Here are some of the cards he published:

“How to get rich. Live on half your income, and live a long time.”
George A. Smith

“Listen not to the teachings of any man, or any elder, who says the Word of Wisdom is of no moment, for such a man will eventually be overthrown.” Hyrum Smith, the Patriarch

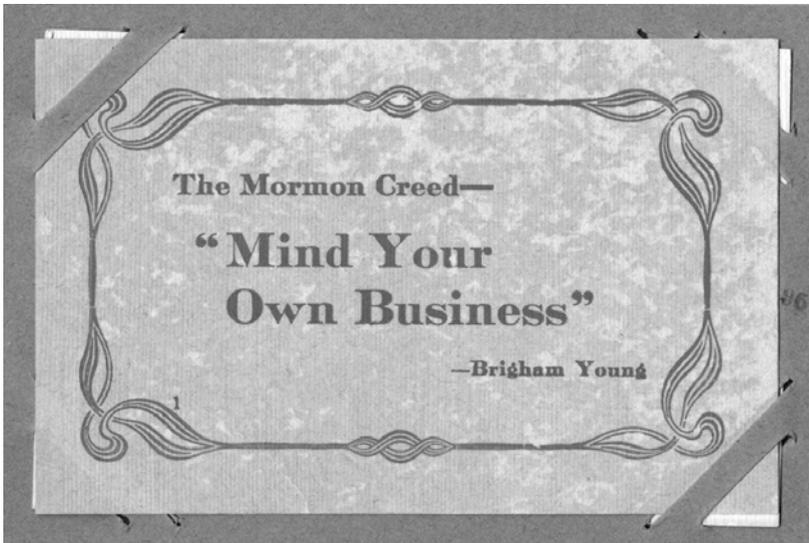
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“If you will visit a stone quarry you will find they use the simplest instruments to crack and remove the largest rocks; so the Lord uses the simplest of His servants to accomplish some of His greatest purposes.”

Heber C. Kimball

“If you want to apostatize, apostatize and behave yourselves.” Brigham Young⁵⁸

As the cards became more popular, members increasingly began asking for copies to share with family, friends, and acquaintances. President Rich soon published a new set of more than fifty cards, which were professionally typeset. The expanded card sets were made available to members and missionaries. Similar to the first set of cards, there was a wide variety of quotations to help assist individuals in sharing the gospel. Some quotations were general in nature (“‘Live within your means, keep out of debt and you will keep out of trouble.’ John R. Winder”); some proclaimed Latter-day Saint



This sample hand-lettered proselyting postcard was designed to be shared with friends and investigators. Printed by Ben E. Rich around 1907. L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

loyalty and patriotism (“God inspired our fathers to make the Declaration of Independence, and sustained them in their struggles for liberty until they conquered. I love American independence; the principle is dear to my heart. When I have been in foreign countries I have felt proud of the American Flag, and have desired that they could have the enjoyment of as much liberty as the American people.’ George A. Smith”). Others taught gospel principles (“As man is, God once was. As God is, man may become.’ Lorenzo Snow”); some were designed to encourage members to keep their covenants (“We talk a great deal about sacrifices, when strictly speaking there is no such thing; it is a misnomer—it is a wrong view of the subject. What we do for the Kingdom of God is the best investment we can possibly make.’ Daniel H. Wells”), while yet others simply reflected the reality of attempting to teach the gospel in the South at the turn of the twentieth century (“The Mormon Creed—‘Mind Your Own Business’—Brigham Young”).⁵⁹

INSIGHTS FROM MISSIONARY JOURNALS

Ben E. Rich had a large impact on missionary work at the beginning of the twentieth century. Not only did he influence the thousands of missionaries who served in his missions, but his books, debates, pamphlets, and talks were widely read and discussed. During the ten years he served as president of the Southern States Mission, for example, his mission sold twenty-five thousand copies of the Book of Mormon and one hundred fifty thousand copies of *Mr. Durant*;⁶⁰ by 1905 over three million copies of *A Friendly Discussion* had been sold.⁶¹

An additional way to gauge what members and missionaries thought about their mission president is to read what they wrote in their journals. George Webster wrote that Ben E. Rich was someone “whome you can not fail tu Love and respect on making his acquaintance 4 he is a kind Genial and loveable Man and is Worthy of Your highest esteem.”⁶² As a missionary, Ephraim Nye wrote that *A Friendly Discussion* “is by all odds the best Tract. . . . [It] seems to win friends for us where ever it is read.”⁶³ Missionaries

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reported that copies and translated versions of *Mr. Durant* that set “forth in plainness the principles of the Gospel” reached Hawaii, New Zealand, Canada, Germany, and even Turkey.⁶⁴

REMEMBERING BEN E. RICH

Following a few weeks of illness, Ben E. Rich died of a stroke in New York City on September 13, 1913, while serving as president of the Eastern States Mission. His wife and two of his sons were with him at his passing. His funeral was held on Sunday afternoon, September 21, 1913, in the Salt Lake Tabernacle, which was filled to capacity. In attendance were the First Presidency, eight of the Twelve Apostles, members of the Presiding Bishopric and First Council of the Seventy, as well as many missionaries who had served under him. President Joseph F. Smith, who presided and conducted the funeral, commented that the “world needs such men as President Ben E. Rich. There are far too few of them. . . . In President Ben E. Rich no confidence was ever misplaced: he failed to fulfill no trust. His character stood out bright and clear in the defense of truth. . . . We loved him because we knew he was trustworthy, because we could depend upon him. . . . He threw his whole soul into his work, he was alive and alert, ever loyal to the Church, to his God and to Utah and the nation of which it is a part.”⁶⁵

Ben E. Rich lived a meaningful life of service, and it was reported that “his activities would fill several ordinary lifetimes.”⁶⁶ In the October 1913 general conference held a few days following his funeral, Elder Heber J. Grant noted that Ben E. Rich had “lived a successful life. He died a millionaire in the wealth which is true wealth and which counts with God. . . . God loved Ben E. Rich. The prophet of God, and all of his associates in the Presidency, and the council of the twelve, and all of the general authorities loved Ben E. Rich. Those who came in intimate contact with him in the Southern States and in the Eastern States, men not of our faith, loved this man.”⁶⁷

In a 1904 issue of the *Elders' Journal*, Ben E. Rich may have best described and foreshadowed his sudden release from missionary work and life

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when he wrote, “Let your release always come as a surprise and your departure be taken with reluctance and with a knowledge of having done well.”⁶⁸ Ben E. Rich served faithfully and truly deserves to be remembered.

NOTES

1. Leonard J. Arrington, *Charles C. Rich: Mormon General and Western Frontiersman* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 185–90.
2. Benjamin L. Rich, *Ben E. Rich: An Appreciation by His Son* (Salt Lake City, 1950), 32–33.
3. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 32–33.



Ben E. Rich at the Joseph Smith monument in Sharon, Vermont. L. Tom Perry Special Collections. Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

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4. *The Bunner-Rich Debate: A Public Discussion between Mr. A. A. Bunner of the Church of Christ and Elder Ben E. Rich of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Chicago: Henry C. Etten, 1912), 18.
5. "That Missionary Ben E. Rich," *Improvement Era*, June 1952, 403.
6. Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Company, 1920), 3:206. Ben E. Rich also had several plural wives: (1) Rose Osmond (date of marriage: September 12, 1885, separated in 1888, no children), (2) Andrea Jensen (date of marriage: December 13, 1888, died of diphtheria shortly after their marriage), (3) Laura Bowering (date of marriage unknown, but believed to be before 1898), and (4) Alice Caroline McLauchan or MacLachlan (date of marriage: October 4, 1899, one adopted boy). See Ted S. Anderson, "The Southern States Mission and the Administration of Ben E. Rich, 1898–1908" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1976), appendix G, 151; and Andrew Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson Memorial Society, 1936), 4:163.
7. "That Missionary Ben E. Rich," *Improvement Era*, June 1952, 487.
8. Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:206.
9. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 11.
10. Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:206.
11. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 11.
12. "Israel Mourns for Ben E. Rich," *Deseret News*, September 22, 1913.
13. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 16.
14. Ben E. Rich returned from his mission in charge of seven hundred Saints who were immigrating to the United States on the ship *Nevada* (see Jenson, *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, 3:206).
15. "Passing Events," *Improvement Era*, October 1913, 1246.
16. Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 820–22.
17. Jenson, *Encyclopedic History*, 497–98.
18. Jack Northman Anderson, "Three-Time Missionary," *Improvement Era*, February 1943, 117.
19. Nephi Jensen Journal, vol. 6, July 17, 1907, 45–48, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT.

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20. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 12.
21. Richard Hartley and Ben E. Rich, *Public Discussion of the Doctrines of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1897).
22. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 13.
23. Ben E. Rich was not the first individual to publish the transcript of a Latter-day Saint's religious debate, but his publications appear to have had a wider audience, and probably reached more readers, than previously published debates.
24. Jesse J. Bennett Journal, vol. 3, 1891, 35, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
25. *The Bunner-Rich Debate*, 5–6.
26. *The Bunner-Rich Debate*.
27. "That Missionary Ben E. Rich," *Improvement Era*, June 1952, 486.
28. Ben E. Rich, *Mr. Durant of Salt Lake*, "That Mormon" (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon and Sons, 1893), iii–iv.
29. Rich, *Mr. Durant*, iv.
30. Rich, *Mr. Durant*, 14.
31. Ben E. Rich, *A Friendly Discussion upon Religious Subjects* (Independence, MO: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, n.d.).
32. Anderson, "Southern States Mission," 58.
33. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 24. It is worth noting that although Roosevelt was elected as the vice president, Theodore Roosevelt became president just as Ben E. Rich had predicted, after President McKinley was killed by an assassin's bullet in September 1901.
34. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 10.
35. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 26.
36. Rich, *Ben E. Rich*, 26.
37. President Theodore Roosevelt publicly supported the Church several times. For example, his support was beneficial in helping Utah's senator-elect, Reed Smoot, be seated in the United States Senate, and he defended the Church in a 1911 article in *Collier's* magazine. See Michael K. Winder, *Presidents and Prophets* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2007), 184, 187.
38. David Horton Elton Journal, vol. 4, 1899–1900, 81–85, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

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39. William L. Woolf, "The Church in New York City," *Improvement Era*, December 1938, 754.
40. Ben E. Rich, *The Elders' Reference—Southern States Mission, 1906*, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
41. Rich, *The Elders' Reference*, 24.
42. "Passing Events," *Improvement Era*, October 1913, 1243–44.
43. Oz Flake Journal, vol. 3, 1899–1900, 50, L. Tom Perry Special Collections. Elder Osmer D. Flake, from Snowflake, Arizona, was president of the Mississippi conference when Ben E. Rich served as president of the Southern States Mission.
44. Ben E. Rich to the Saints of the Eastern States Mission, July 31, 1909, Church History Library.
45. Ben E. Rich, in Conference Report, April 1902, 62.
46. It was customary at the time to hold outdoor sessions of conference for overflow crowds, and for several years Ben E. Rich was invited to speak outdoors as well as in the Tabernacle.
47. Ben E. Rich, in Conference Report, October 1905, Overflow Meeting, 97.
48. Anderson, "Southern States Mission," 41.
49. Ben E. Rich, "Index to Volume One of the Southern Star," *Southern Star*, November 1899, Introductory.
50. Anderson, "Southern States Mission," 44–45.
51. That publication was named the *Elders' Journal* in homage to the original *Elders' Journal* "published in Kirtland in 1837, and in Far West, Missouri in 1838." *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 558–64.
52. The editors and the names of the periodicals they established include John Taylor (the *Mormon*, 1855–57), George Q. Cannon (the *Western Standard*, 1856), Erastus Snow (*St. Louis Luminary*, 1854–55), and Latter-day Saints and Orson Pratt (the *Seer*, 1853–54).
53. Arnold K. Garr and Clark V. Johnson, eds., *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint History: Missouri* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1994), 176–77.
54. Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History*, 431–32.

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55. Anderson, "Southern States Mission," 72. "The Mormon Faith: What It Is and the Progress Being Made in the South," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 26, 1899.
56. See Matthias F. Cowley, *Prophets and Patriarchs* (Chattanooga, TN: Ben E. Rich, 1902); Matthias F. Cowley, *The Blood of the Prophets* (Chattanooga, TN: Ben E. Rich, 1902); M. F. Cowley, *Cowley's Talks on Doctrine* (Chattanooga, TN: Ben E. Rich, 1902); and Ben E. Rich, ed., *Scrapbook of Mormon Literature, Volume 1: Religious Tracts* (Chicago: Henry C. Etten, n.d.).
57. Anderson, "Southern States Mission," 58n30.
58. Ben E. Rich, "Truths" from *Latter-day Prophets* (Chattanooga, TN: Ben E. Rich, 1902), L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
59. *Emil Leroy Huber Mormon Postcards, 1908–1920* (Chattanooga, TN: Ben E. Rich), L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
60. Ben E. Rich, in Conference Report, April 1910, 89.
61. Ben E. Rich, *Mr. Durant of Salt Lake City, "That Mormon"* (Chattanooga, TN: Southern States Mission, undated), preface (dated September 1905).
62. George Thomas Webster Journal, vol. 5, 1898–1901, 117, L. Tom Perry Special Collections; original spelling retained.
63. Ephraim H. Nye Journal, 1897–1900, 3:231, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.
64. See the following missionary journals in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT: Eugene M. Cannon Journal, vol. 1, 1893–94, 98; Henry Moss Journal, vol. 1, 1894–95, 6; William Benbow Erikson Journal, vol. 1, 1899–1900, 22; Alma Butler Journal, vol. 1, 1910–11, 252–53; Abraham Owen Woodruff Journal, vol. 2, 1895–96, 113; Joseph W. Booth Journal, vol. 1, 1898–99, 133–37.
65. "Israel Mourns for Ben E. Rich," *Deseret News*, September 22, 1913.
66. "That Missionary Ben E. Rich," *Improvement Era*, June 1952, 403.
67. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, October 1913, 87.
68. Ben E. Rich, "Lagging Enthusiasm," *Elders' Journal*, January 1904, 65.



Elder D. Arthur Haycock, 1935, prior to leaving for Hawaii. All images in this chapter are courtesy of Lynnette H. Dowdle.