



*Max H Parkin*

# *Max H Parkin*

INTERVIEW BY ALEXANDER L. BAUGH



**MAX H PARKIN** is coeditor of volumes in the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*. He received a BS degree in business from the University of Utah, an MA from Brigham Young University in history and philosophy of religion, and a PhD from BYU in LDS Church history and doctrine. Some of his writings include *Conflict at Kirtland and Missouri*, volume four of the Sacred Places series. He served as a volunteer researcher in the Museum of Church History and Art, was a lecturer on Sea Trek 2001, and taught for the Church Educational System for fifty years, principally at the Institute of Religion at the University of Utah.

**ALEXANDER L. BAUGH**, professor of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University, received his BS from Utah State University and his MA and PhD degrees from BYU.

He specializes in the Missouri period (1831–39) of early LDS Church history. He is a member of the Mormon History Association and the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation and is a member and past president of the John Whitmer Historical Association (2006–7). He served as editor of *Mormon Historical Studies* and is codirector of research for the Religious Studies Center at BYU and volume editor for *The Joseph Smith Papers*.

THE INTERVIEW

**BAUGH:** What are some of your early memories of growing up in Bountiful? Talk about the influence your parents, siblings, Church leaders, and teachers had on you during your childhood and youth.

**PARKIN:** I was the sixth son of seven boys. My parents raised their sons largely during the Great Depression and World War II. Both periods impacted our family and me personally. I remember those periods well and some of the difficulties they brought our family. The Great Depression was hard on us, as it was on many in Utah. In the late 1930s, when jobs were still scarce, we received some government relief, and I remember going to Bountiful's Stoker School with my younger brother, Bruce, dressed in government-issued clothes, which were a distinctive green-tinted khaki and were rough and itchy. Since only a few other boys in the school wore such clothes, I felt conspicuous, but I never sensed being harmfully singled out because of my clothes. Sometimes my dad, a mechanic, miner, and truck driver, got employment doing menial jobs, but it was hard for both parents. On a personal note, I remember one time Mother was unable to cook dinner because she had no coal for the stove. She sent me out to the coal shed to rake up a little coal, but there was none. She next sent me to the distant railroad tracks with a pail to pick up any coal I could find that had fallen from the coal cars. We boys also worked on the local farms as day laborers. I remember that for years during harvest time we were allowed almost daily to bring home surplus vegetables

that were not used for the market. Consequently, I grew up eating an abundance of vegetables but little meat, except for the chickens we raised. Those are some of the memories I have of growing up.

Because of the lack of employment in Utah even in 1941, my oldest brother, Kimball, joined the US Army, and another brother, Glenn, joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and then the US Navy, all before the war started. In August that year, my father read a newspaper ad about the government needing civilian employees to work for the Department of the Navy in Hawaii for the attractive wage of \$1.27 an hour. He left for Honolulu and worked on warships at Pearl Harbor, including my brother Glenn's heavy cruiser when it was in port. Of course, my father was there on the eventful morning of December 7, 1941, and my brother was nearby at sea. That morning, a diving Japanese fighter pilot fired tracers at my father and then saluted him as he turned his plane skyward. Falling to the ground but unharmed, my dad dug the .50-caliber shell out of the pavement after it had passed through his clothing. My brother Glenn arrived at Pearl Harbor the following morning to see its vast destruction and to look for his father.

At home, at age eleven, I remember that eventful Sunday and mother's tearful reaction to the radio news from the islands. Because Hawaii was put under martial law and under extreme security, it was many days before she learned of her family's safety. Altogether, five of my brothers joined the service during the war. Glenn later had two ships sunk under him in the Pacific by Japanese torpedoes and bombs. Following his second sinking, he went adrift for three days on a net raft in the Pacific Ocean but survived with wounds. My brother Wallace, at age nineteen, had his leg amputated at the hip in France, and my twenty-year-old brother, George, the one next to me, was killed in an accident in the Navy after receiving his orders to go overseas. As a young teenager, my brothers were my heroes. I remember Mother receiving telegrams from the Department of War, hearing shocking radio reports about battles her sons were in, receiving a

letter from President Harry S. Truman about the death of her son, and getting other notices informing her of these family tragedies. Wars, like depressions, are hardest on mothers.

**BAUGH:** Let's talk about your education. It sounds like not many of your family actually went to college.

**PARKIN:** Both of my parents finished junior high school in Bountiful but went no further. My brothers Kimball and George finished high school at Davis, but the three brothers in between them did not. One of these brothers, before joining the army, had serious trouble with the law when Dad was away at Pearl Harbor, which was another burden Mother bore. My younger brother Bruce graduated from college in accounting and became the Bountiful City recorder and later city treasurer and the town's folk historian.

At age fourteen I received a wonderful patriarchal blessing that influenced me. I remember my Sunday School teacher driving members of his class to Farmington, where the patriarch and stake president lived, to receive our blessings. Since Mother talked a lot about the importance of education, a passage in my blessing greatly impressed me. The patriarch said, "Wisdom and knowledge shall flow unto you from the portals of heaven in answer to your humble petitions." I always felt inspired by that. As a serious boy, I seemed always to be interested in learning and gaining understanding, and for that reason my years in seminary were important to me. I enjoyed learning about the Bible and about spiritual things. (The Book of Mormon was not taught in our seminary until long after I left, so I read it on my own.) My interest in history began as a sophomore in high school, both in seminary and more particularly in a world history course.

**BAUGH:** When did you go on your mission?

**PARKIN:** I left for my mission two years after I finished high school and ended my agriculture employment and just after I had spent two good years at BYU. After my first year at college, however,

my funds were depleted, so my roommate at the Y, a Bountiful friend, and I flew to Alaska on a freight plane as construction laborers in June that year to earn money for college and our missions. At the time, Anchorage, Alaska, was a small frontier town about the size of Bountiful. Unfortunately, when we arrived, my close friend and I were separated. He left for the interior, and I worked on a construction site a few miles from Anchorage. Meanwhile, I met another BYU student from Utah who had just arrived after driving the Alcan Highway. Though we worked on separate jobs, my new friend, Don Beck, and I lived together in a little shack in the woods for its economy rather than in the more expensive construction camp. I walked two miles through the woods from our little dwelling to my job site. I attended church on Sunday in a little branch in Anchorage, held in a rented American Legion Hall, and attended priesthood there on Wednesday nights. My two friends both returned to Utah in late August, and I returned in December. When I sailed from Seward across the Gulf of Alaska to Juneau in an old freighter, we were caught in a wretched storm, which for days made not only the few passengers and crew seasick, but also the seasoned captain. We then sailed down to Seattle, where my parents met me. I spent the rest of the school year at BYU before my mission the following September.

**BAUGH:** Talk about your mission to Hawaii. Most people today would be pretty thrilled to go to Hawaii, and now I understand that your dad and brothers had been there.

**PARKIN:** It was a delight to go to Hawaii, where my father and two of my brothers had served during the war. I appreciated seeing places my father had talked about, particularly Pearl Harbor. Some of the harbor's war rubble was still in place, including the destroyed battleships the USS *Utah* and the USS *Arizona* before they were memorialized. I arrived in Hawaii in 1950, just two months after the Church celebrated the centennial anniversary of Mormonism in the islands. During the celebration, the two existing missions that had

served the islands were combined, and the striking new Honolulu Stake Tabernacle was dedicated. My earliest companions spoke either Japanese or Hawaiian, having served there in their respective missions. The combined mission made learning a language no longer required. In Honolulu, the Japanese Saints had previously been segregated into their own mission and branches, and the branch segregation continued there after the missions were combined.

I first labored in Honolulu, housed at the mission headquarters next to the tabernacle, but I was soon transferred to a vibrant and friendly Japanese branch in the Kaimuki District, just inland from the Diamond Head crater and Waikiki. Race was never a problem with me, even with the war, and I quickly learned to love the Japanese people. We tracted our district and found an impressive Chinese woman who was married to the University of Hawaii's football coach, a Hawaiian and an inactive Latter-day Saint. My companion baptized the woman and her children after I left the district. I did not have a highly productive mission, personally, in terms of baptisms, but from my first companion to the last, we applied ourselves to the work.

**BAUGH:** To what extent did your mission lay another foundation for your life? Did it have a major impact on how you viewed Mormonism or the restored gospel?

**PARKIN:** I suppose any sensitive missionary would find his two years in the mission field impactful, and I did. But because I was a serious young man, my two years in the mission field served to strengthen me—working hard and reading the scriptures and major Church books like Talmage's *Jesus the Christ*, *The Articles of Faith*, and *The Great Apostasy*. At that time, I favored the writings of Joseph Fielding Smith and Orson Pratt and read their books. It was only well after my mission that I began to read the other works of Talmage and also those by John A. Widtsoe, B. H. Roberts, and the scientist Henry Eyring, a board member of the Deseret Sunday School Union, all of which broadened my views considerably. Years later I learned of the

disparate views held by Elder Smith and Elder Roberts. Meanwhile, I matured, becoming more moderate, and appreciated my mission experience very much.

**BAUGH:** I'm assuming you went right back to school after your mission. That's when you met Yvonne and started life together.

**PARKIN:** When I left Hawaii, the Korean War was still going furiously. I returned in September 1952 and felt a need to get into college quickly, or else I'd be drafted. My father had died while Bruce and I were in the mission field, and Mother was determined not to have another son in the service, at least not without the benefit of a military commission. So I rapidly enrolled in the air force ROTC program at the University of Utah. Elder Beckstrand, a missionary companion who returned home with me, joined the air force to avoid being drafted and was soon sent to Japan.

After attending the University of Utah fall quarter that year, I transferred to BYU to strengthen my relationship with a girl I knew there from Davis High. However, the relationship didn't develop, and I soon met Yvonne. She had been baptized into the Church in February 1953, just three weeks before I met her. She had come from Inglewood, California, to attend BYU at the invitation of a high school girlfriend. As nonmembers, both girls took a class from Professor B. West Belnap, director of undergraduate religion, who taught a religion course for non-Mormon students. Both young women were converted and baptized by Brother Belnap. Yvonne had a darling personality, and we talked a good deal, becoming close friends quickly. After waiting a year following her baptism, we were married in the spring in the Salt Lake Temple. Brother and Sister Belnap were present at our temple marriage, which was nice for Yvonne, since her family could not attend the temple. Yvonne's mother was an excellent Christian woman who had often listened to Elder Richard L. Evans and the Tabernacle Choir program on the radio in California. Consequently, we had Elder Evans marry us. Yvonne's mother sat



on a bench on Temple Square, pondering the events in the temple, as Elder Evans performed the ceremony. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, neither she nor any other member of the family joined the Church.

**BAUGH:** Talk about how you became interested in Church history and the kind of direction your life took at the University of Utah and the LDS Institute of Religion there.

**PARKIN:** After one quarter at the Y, I returned to the University of Utah, courting Yvonne at a distance. Then, after marriage and two years in the ROTC, I left the latter undertaking. Being trained as a navigator, I failed my second-year physical exam for color blindness and was dropped from the program. Then, as a senior at the University of Utah and about to graduate in business administration and marketing, I was hired by Western Airlines as a station agent at the old Salt Lake City Airport. After receiving much training, I enjoyed my work there and considered making it a lifetime career. However, during my third year of employment, the airline pilots went on strike, forcing all employees at Western out of work for three months. This became a significant turning point in my life.

**BAUGH:** What happened?

**PARKIN:** Since I was married, with a little boy, and Yvonne was not working, I secured temporary employment with the maintenance people at the University of Utah. While working in janitorial services, I sought for a break in the mornings to take an institute class. Although I had taken two years of religion classes at BYU and had attended many meetings in the institute building as a member of Delta Phi, the returned missionary fraternity, I had not taken a class at the Institute of Religion at the U. But then, for a morning diversion, I enrolled in a Church history class taught by T. Edgar Lyon. It was a marvelous class, and I became so interested in the subject that I soon enrolled in his other courses. After the pilot's

strike ended, I continued taking courses from Brother Lyon because of the flexibility of my work schedule until I soon graduated from the Salt Lake Institute of Religion, as it was named then. It was Brother Lyon's matter-of-fact forthrightness and his abundant knowledge of Mormon history and the Doctrine and Covenants that attracted my attention.

**BAUGH:** Did Professor Belnap have a role in your decision to leave Western Airlines?

**PARKIN:** He certainly did. Sometime after I returned to Western Airlines after the strike, West Belnap visited Yvonne and me in our apartment in Salt Lake. He said, "Max, you are the man that we need to enter the seminary program. Would you be interested?" I was indeed. These two events—the pilot's strike, which opened the door for me to take institute classes from Brother Lyon, and West Belnap's invitation to teach seminary—came together at an ideal time in my life. Later, in the summer of 1957, Yvonne and I were interviewed by Brother Boyd K. Packer, a seminary supervisor, and I was assigned to teach seminary at Pocatello High School in Pocatello, Idaho.

**BAUGH:** Did you pursue your master's at the same time you were teaching seminary?

**PARKIN:** Yes. I started my degree in 1958 when I was in Pocatello, immediately after my first year of teaching seminary and three years before I returned to Salt Lake City. I was accepted into BYU's College of Religious Instruction, recently established to provide graduate degrees for teachers in the seminaries and institutes of the Church. The new college was strengthened by a growing faculty of PhDs, and I enrolled in classes offered by the Department of Church History and Philosophy. While we were in Pocatello, I attended summer school at BYU and continued doing so for several summers after we moved back to Utah. Meantime, while teaching in

Pocatello, I enrolled in two or three theology courses offered by the Catholic Church to strengthen my knowledge of theology, including a night class taught by the local Catholic priest, Father Carroll. I became rather friendly with him, and after class one evening, I told him the story of the First Vision, which evoked an interesting and friendly response.

After returning to Utah, I attended afternoon and evening classes on BYU campus and night classes in Salt Lake as part of the university's extension program. I remember Drs. A. Burt Horsley, Milton V. Backman, Sidney B. Sperry, and others coming to Salt Lake to teach classes for many graduate students there, myself included. The BYU graduate religion professors, trained in various disciplines with high academic standards, were very accommodating in helping us get our degrees, as were the administrators of the seminaries and institutes. Some of my excellent graduate teachers at BYU, besides those I've named, were Richard Lloyd Anderson, Hyrum L. Andrus, David H. Yarn, Richard L. Bushman, Rodney Turner, Hugh W. Nibley, James R. Clark, Truman G. Madsen, and later Wilfred C. Griggs, and others, all recipients of doctorates at prestigious schools like Harvard, Cal-Berkeley, Columbia, and other respected institutions. I felt I had found a gold mine of scholastic excellence. A few of my fellow students—Dean C. Jessee, Larry C. Porter, LaMar C. Berrett, Monte S. Nyman, Edward J. Brandt, Kenneth W. Godfrey, Leland H. Gentry, and Robert J. Woodford—later made names for themselves. Also, to help acquire my Idaho and Utah state teaching certificates, I took several courses in education, including a teaching methods class on campus taught jointly and good-naturedly by Boyd K. Packer and A. Theodore Tuttle, our own two seminary supervisors. These two brethren were rather popular as teachers, and as team teachers they played off each other very well. I engaged in all my graduate courses while teaching full-time and trying to do my duty in various callings in the Church, and still spending ample time with my family, or so they told me. I learned that perseverance, balance, and moderation

are the keys in meeting life's demands, and, of course, having the help of a cooperative wife.

**BAUGH:** So after you completed your master's degree, you pursued your doctorate, but first tell us about your master's thesis.

**PARKIN:** I enjoyed my master's work very much and later also the work for my PhD at BYU. In fact, they were wonderful and challenging years for me. I enjoyed classes in philosophy, Christian and LDS history, world religions, and scripture and LDS doctrine from the professors I've named. Some of the names of the courses I took were "Christian History to the 4th Century," "Philosophy of Religion," "American Religious History," "History of the Papacy," "Paul's Life and Letters," "Documents of Mormon History," and a host of other courses. In 1976, the prominent, though sadly now deceased, Stephen R. Covey and I were the last two candidates to receive doctorate degrees from our department before the university closed the college. When I worked on my doctorate, my wife joined me on campus during the summers to get her bachelor's degree in elementary education, which our marriage had earlier cut short. We cherished those experiences at the Y together. Yvonne later taught children at Woodstock Elementary School in South Cottonwood for twenty-seven years, and after retiring, an additional twelve years as a popular substitute teacher, mainly at Twin Peaks School, which our children had attended.

**BAUGH:** Specifically, how did you progress on your master's thesis?

**PARKIN:** I researched and wrote my master's thesis while I was teaching at Olypmus Seminary in Salt Lake. My thesis turned out to be somewhat of a problem. Dr. Hugh Nibley, a scholar at BYU with a reputation bigger than life, invited me to do a thesis on Fawn M. Brodie's book *No Man Knows My History*, a critical biography of Joseph Smith. Brother Nibley had written a booklet on the subject, which he told me was an inadequate piece of fluff, waiting for something

more serious to be done. He wanted me to look at Brodie's book and examine all of the footnote references and citations for accuracy. His point was that he believed Brodie misquoted or otherwise misrepresented her sources and drew faulty conclusions accordingly. So my thesis was to compare her four hundred or so footnotes and citations with their original sources and see what I found. My yearlong study was an enormous eye-opener for me. Still being conservative in my thinking and in my faith, and being a young seminary teacher as well, I struggled in what I found, for I had not been prepared for it.

**BAUGH:** Did you do the study?

**PARKIN:** Yes, in part. I asked Dr. Milton V. Backman Jr., one of my excellent teachers, to chair my committee, and upon his approving my thesis topic, I began my research. I carefully read Brodie's book and examined the sources contained in its several hundred citations, and, surprisingly, verified that Brodie generally quoted her sources accurately. Consequently, on a personal note, I was troubled over some of the things I read both in her book and in the sources I checked. Some of them I had known earlier, but others were new and startling to me. As I wrestled with them, I sought counsel. I went to my former teacher T. Edgar Lyon to talk with him about them. He cautioned me about doing a study on Brodie's book. He said, "You have a tiger by the tail" and added little to encourage me. I talked with Alma P. Burton, assistant to William E. Berrett, administrator of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, who had written something on Brodie. Brother Burton tried to discourage me from doing that subject, I supposed, because I was a seminary teacher under his leadership. I visited with Clair Noall, author of *Intimate Disciple*, an insightful and revealing work on Willard Richards and his close association with the Prophet Joseph at Nauvoo. Clair, an associate of Fawn Brodie, informed me that President Stephen L. Richards had given her full access to the Willard Richards papers in the Church Archives when such access was very rare and that I could trust her

book, which contained stories and events about the Prophet similar to those in *No Man Knows My History* but often with a different twist to their meaning. Hence, Clair cautioned me about Brodie's sometimes faulty conclusions drawn from the same original sources that she too had used. I also visited with Stan Ivins, son of deceased President Anthony W. Ivins. Stan, an aged man by this time and a bachelor, had spent a lifetime researching Mormon history and was believed to have clandestinely supplied Brodie with material from the Church Archives. The elderly William Lund, Assistant Church Historian, by hard lessons he had learned, confirmed this to me. Lastly, in June 1963, I twice visited President Joseph Fielding Smith, Church historian. He proved to be the least helpful and disappointing in the sense that he didn't take Mrs. Brodie seriously, nor any of her more accusing disclosures about the Prophet Joseph Smith that Stan Ivins, Clair Noall, and some of Brodie's sources had clearly confirmed to me. As the longtime Church historian, President Smith didn't help, and his empty answers perplexed me. Though still anchored in faith, I went through a spiritual struggle with what I found in examining Mrs. Brodie's sources and was left without anyone else to discuss them with meaningfully. Consequently, because of two growing concerns, I concluded not to finish the thesis.

**BAUGH:** What were your concerns?

**PARKIN:** The first one was that I feared that once I completed the work, the university would reject it either for policy reasons or for fear that critics of Mormonism somehow would use it to support Brodie's book. (About this time, I learned how school administrators sat on Dean Jessee's insightful master's thesis on the Manifesto, which was finally made available to readers only due to outside accreditation pressures.) Working through the issue, I went to see Dr. Sidney B. Sperry, for whom I had much esteem, knowing too that he was respected in Salt Lake City, and discussed my misgivings with him. He said that, if necessary, he would personally take

my thesis, when completed, to President David O. McKay and get it approved, encouraging me to continue with it. I also consulted with Professors Nibley and Backman, both of whom were encouraging. Yet the approval factor still weighed on me.

**BAUGH:** You said you also had a second concern.

**PARKIN:** My second concern related to the first. Inasmuch as I found and would report that Mrs. Brodie had cited the majority of her sources correctly—she misquoted only about 3 or 4 percent—I feared that my name might forever be linked to hers adversely. Did I want to risk this association? While Professor Nibley thought there was enough in my findings to take advantage of her errors, I believed that her small percentage of citation mistakes—my thesis’s main focus—was not unusual for a book its size. However, I believed that she had made another, more serious mistake—namely, her biased selection of sources and the way she used them. That is, she seemingly selected the types of quotes that painted a preconceived lurid portrait of Joseph Smith. She used word hues in describing Joseph and selected sources that suited her coloring or point of view and avoided using those that argued for a more balanced and, I believed, a more objective treatment of the Prophet. Therefore, even after receiving Professor Sperry’s support, I realized that my name, indeed, might become unfavorably tied to Mrs. Brodie and her book. So, after spending the year on the thesis, I dropped it.

**BAUGH:** Knowing you, I suppose you were strengthened by the experience.

**PARKIN:** I will say that in all that I passed through, I came out of the struggle with a greater understanding of Joseph Smith and with tougher spiritual convictions. In fact, that is the reason I share this story. I gained a resolve to be forthright and encouraging with any student of mine who might have his or her own issues with our religious heritage. I would also try to avoid building spiritual traps for

students, as we teachers sometimes do, carelessly teaching things that later have to be untaught. This may be illustrated by events in some of the BYU graduate classes I took. Some graduate students—usually older seminary teachers or perhaps some rigid younger ones—would sometimes rebel forcefully in class, or sometimes in whispers, against some point of instruction of a well-intentioned professor. For example, on one occasion in a scripture class, a graduate student stood up with clenched fists and railed against the faithful instructor. The student seemed to ignore the fact that our professors, too, were faithful members of the Church, who wanted only to help us separate the facts from our own occasionally poorly conceived traditions or misconceptions, however sincere they may be. Sometimes, things about our scriptures or about Joseph Smith were not as well understood by our people years ago as they are now. Sometimes, too, even our leaders, both ecclesiastical and educational, were slow in accepting new information and rarely supported the informed seminary or institute teacher when a complaint about his teachings arose. However, the poorly known subjects of my concerns of fifty years ago are now better understood by our people, or more easily can be. Hence, today, problems in our history are treated more transparently in faithful works about Joseph Smith, such as those by Mormon writers Donna Hill, Richard L. Bushman, and Leonard J. Arrington, and even by Dean C. Jesse or James Allen and Davis Bitton, the latter two of whom served as Assistant Church Historians, and by respectable non-Mormon historians such as the Jacksonian historian Robert Remini and the effervescent Jan Shipps. I believe that most questions or difficult issues can be discussed in a classroom if they are appropriate for the lesson and if they are taught in a context of faith.

**BAUGH:** Talk about your early years in Church education.

**PARKIN:** I taught in four seminaries in the Pocatello area with several other fine teachers during the four years I was there. Yvonne and I also built a house, not knowing when we would return



to Utah. But the transfer finally came, and I was assigned to Olympus Seminary in Salt Lake City, where I taught for five years when the delightful but older Frank McGee was the principal. My students were great; I enjoyed them very much. I had the pleasure of teaching Elder Paul H. Dunn's daughter, Elder Thomas S. Monson's younger sister, and other fine young people. Sister Janice Farley, a fellow teacher, taught Steve Iba, an excellent young man and one of our student officers, who later served as a leader in the central office of Seminaries and Institutes. I also had the opportunity there to teach a year or two with my faithful Wahiawa, Oahu, mission companion Therald Beckstrand, who also became a seminary and institute teacher. After that I taught a year at Sandy Seminary and Hillcrest Seminary in Midvale.

**BAUGH:** Did you want to teach at the institute level?

**PARKIN:** I did indeed. That was my hope. I had a yearning to teach institute students, but Yvonne didn't want to leave Salt Lake City again while we were raising our children and move to where that opportunity existed. The institute at the University of Utah, the small craft school that became Salt Lake Community College, and LDS Business College were the only schools that had Institutes of Religion in the Salt Lake Valley, and they were fully staffed. A visit with President William E. Berrett ended any hope I had to teach at the Institute of Religion at the University of Utah. He told me that he had a list of proven and deserving institute teachers in the field with their PhDs, waiting in line to teach at the Salt Lake Institute.

Accordingly, in 1968, hoping for a change in my eleven-year teaching career, I contacted my Salt Lake Area seminary supervisor, Lyman Berrett, to be considered as a principal at one of the new seminaries coming on line at the new Salt Lake high schools at Alta, Brighton, and Cottonwood, but he said the principals had already been selected well in advance. Nevertheless, the interview with Lyman Berrett soon produced results. About a month later, he telephoned.

“Max, would you be interested in teaching at the Salt Lake Institute? If you are,” he added, “call Joe Christensen.” Brother Berrett had responded to a late-in-the-summer request by Dr. Christensen to recommend someone to fill an unexpected opening. By this time, I had my master’s degree and very happily made an appointment with Joe J. Christensen, who had been appointed director of the Salt Lake Institute of Religion at the University of Utah two years previously, replacing Lowell Bennion. Brother Christensen wanted someone to open an institute at Stevens-Henager College, a new half-time position, and the teacher could teach the other half at the university institute (which in two years became full-time). I accepted it, and life took on a new vitality. I saw it as one of the greatest blessings of my life, and I am grateful to both men for their help.

At the time of Joe’s visit to interview me, I was working on an assignment originated by President Hugh B. Brown. Wesley P. Walters, a Presbyterian minister in Illinois, had recently published a significant article in a ministerial journal, and it was republished as an anti-Mormon tract against Joseph Smith and the historical setting of the First Vision. The minister’s groundbreaking research had alarmed President Brown, who appointed Truman G. Madsen to organize a group of historians to counter the article by doing our own research on the subject, which the Church had not previously done. Truman appointed a few scholars—Milton V. Backman, Larry C. Porter, and one other—to go east and asked me to research the large collections of Stan Ivins and Dale Morgan on the early Mormon research they had collected that was housed in the Utah State Historical Society archives located in the governor’s mansion on South Temple. From his trip to New York, Professor Backman produced a book, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, which blunted Reverend Walters’s criticisms and gave the Church new insights on Joseph’s early years in Palmyra that even B. H. Roberts in his *Comprehensive History of the Church* had incorrectly detailed. It was while I was working on this project in a regal-appearing room in that beautiful state building that Brother

Christensen came to interview me to join his faculty. Meeting Joe in this circumstance may have helped my cause.

**BAUGH:** Let's back up a bit. Could you talk about your master's degree? You probably would not have received the opportunity to teach on the college level without first getting your master's, correct?

**PARKIN:** True. I was teaching at Olympus Seminary when I started working on my second thesis topic to complete my master's program. Because I felt that I wanted to make a contribution to Church history writing, I selected a topic that I believed would fill a void. My thesis question was "What caused so much trouble for the Church at Kirtland in the 1830s?" Of course, I knew about the Kirtland Safety Society problems from Brodie and from Brother Lyon's institute classes, but was that all? So I decided to do a more complete study on the nature and cause of Mormon conflict in Ohio during the years the Saints were there. I soon discovered that other troubles existed, ones that extended from Ezra Booth's complaints against the Prophet in letters to Edward Partridge in 1831, Joseph's reported affair with Fanny Alger in 1835, the Kirtland bank problems, the Saints' speculative land difficulties in 1837, and more. My study was another eye-opener. I started my research on the new thesis in July 1964, again in the Church Archives located on the second floor of the Church Administration Building, next to Joseph Fielding Smith's office, where I had visited him twice the previous year. The faithful but old curmudgeon William Lund, as keeper of the records, added to the tension of nearly everyone who did research there. He seemed to place all researchers under suspicion and behaved accordingly, creating problems that I witnessed almost every day I was there. Perhaps his sternness arose from Stan Ivins's research there during the Brodie years.

At the Church Archives, I also met Leonard Arrington, a fellow researcher, a member of the stake presidency, and a professor of economics at Utah State University. I later read his excellent book *Great Basin Kingdom* and was impressed with his scholarship and with

him personally. When my friend Dean Jessee arrived in the archives in November that year, I visited him in his wire-mesh, open-to-view, secure room as he organized and read early historical manuscripts. President Smith, as Church historian, had recently hired Dean to read and catalog early documents of the Church. Brother Jessee soon began to build a foundation for his later monolith, the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Dean, a former fellow graduate student and now for fifty years my neighbor and friend, has taught us a great deal about Joseph Smith's history and how it was written. Likewise, Howard C. Searle, my colleague at the Salt Lake Institute, has contributed to our understanding with his insightful UCLA dissertation on Joseph Smith's history and his descriptive articles in *BYU Studies* about the subject. From their work, we learned important things about how our history was written that we previously had not known.

**BAUGH:** Talk about your thesis on Kirtland.

**PARKIN:** My thesis on Kirtland was probably the most professionally helpful thing I've done, and it gained some recognition. It took two or three years to do the research and writing. Professor Milton V. Backman, still my graduate chairman, was very helpful but demanding. I had to rewrite much of the text three times for him. As I was finishing it, he thought it was too much for only a master's thesis and suggested that I petition for a doctorate instead and skip my master's degree. I turned this down, believing I yet had little hope of moving into the institute program in Salt Lake City. Also, since my coursework for my master's was all finished, I felt that I should quickly get that degree and then see what happened.

**BAUGH:** I read your thesis in my own graduate program. That's when I first became acquainted with who you were and some of the work you had done.

**PARKIN:** Thank you, Alex. Likewise, it was from your own insightful dissertation on the Mormon conflict in upper Missouri,

years later, that I first heard of you. My thesis helped me in another way, too. Robert J. Matthews, a supervisor in the central office of Seminaries and Institutes, selected it for a limited publication for their school libraries. It was in this printing that I gave it the short title “Conflict at Kirtland.” I was deeply honored by Brother Matthews’s offer since it gave the study an added lift. I tried to get the thesis published commercially, but the people at the University of Utah Press, who said they liked it, were short of funds that biennium, and both Deseret Book and Bookcraft said it was too controversial for them to publish. Today, since better works have been written about Kirtland, my study is out-of-date and is certainly no longer so controversial.

**BAUGH:** So when did you consider getting a PhD?

**PARKIN:** Once I started teaching at the Salt Lake Institute I applied to the doctoral program at BYU, again in the field of history and philosophy of religion, with an emphasis on Mormon history and doctrine. A situation occurred that directed me in choosing my dissertation topic. At first, I considered expanding my master’s thesis and doing a more complete history of the Saints at Kirtland, but Leonard Arrington, who became the new Church historian in 1972, influenced a change of topic. Shortly after his appointment, Brother Arrington received approval from the Brethren to do a new sixteen-volume history of the Church. It was to be a comprehensive history of the Latter-day Saints and was to be completed by 1980, the Church’s sesquicentennial. He selected sixteen separate historians to write the individual volumes. For some reason, he selected me as one of those sixteen historians. However, I was the only one without a doctorate. While I expected to be asked to expand my Kirtland thesis, he instead assigned Milt Backman to do the Ohio history. Although this sesquicentennial history was later aborted by the Church, Professor Backman used his research for *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838*. It’s a fine book, and he was the right man to do the history of Kirtland. Meanwhile, Leonard Arrington had asked

me to write the volume on Missouri. This prompted me quickly to get started on a dissertation associated with Mormonism in Missouri, and I subsequently completed my dissertation, “A History of the Latter-day Saints in Clay County, Missouri, from 1833–1837.” The study, with Professor Backman again as my chair, also included an analysis of Church-owned lands in Jackson County held by Bishop Edward Partridge and land privately owned by Mormons in Clay County, where the Church itself acquired no land.

**BAUGH:** So the offer to write this history of Missouri led you to anticipate that you would use your dissertation as that volume?

**PARKIN:** Not as the Missouri volume itself, but as I said, it gave me direction to do a dissertation on some aspect of Missouri. Clay County was an important part of our history, and the nearly three years the Saints were there proved to be troublesome ones. In fact, the Saints were eventually driven from Clay County as they had been from Jackson County, though not so dramatically. Violence erupted in 1836 when beatings by mobs began to occur, and our people knew they had to leave the county or face severe consequences.

**BAUGH:** On a personal note, in my own doctoral experience, I read Warren Jennings’s dissertation on the Jackson County period, Leland Gentry’s dissertation on the northern Missouri period, and your dissertation on the Clay County episode. These three dissertations steered my course and ignited my interest in the Missouri period of LDS history.

**PARKIN:** I am honored that it made a contribution. In turn, your dissertation contributed to the better understanding of our history in upper Missouri. A year after receiving my doctoral degree in 1976, I spent the summer in western Missouri with a team of BYU researchers, including Lyndon W. Cook, Leland H. Gentry, and Paul Anderson, who later became a director of BYU’s art museum. The group was directed by Dr. LaMar C. Berrett, chair of the Church

History Department, who also brought his graduate assistant, Stephen C. LeSueur, to work with us. Stephen later turned sour toward the Church and wrote his popular but less-friendly version of events in upper Missouri in his book, *The 1838 Mormon War in Missouri*. This book needed an alternative voice, which you, Alex, appropriately provided with your dissertation.

**BAUGH:** Tell us about some of your research experiences.

**PARKIN:** While I have related some experiences about my master's thesis, let me say something about my doctorate. I arrived in Independence, Missouri, in June 1973 to further my research for my dissertation. I quickly began getting acquainted with the broader Mormon community there, inasmuch as Independence was the headquarters of several churches of the restoration—the RLDS (now the Community of Christ); the Church of Christ (Temple Lot), sometimes called the Hedrickites; the Cutlerites; and a few others. I attended their meetings, as well as my own, and got acquainted with their leaders. Soon, Maurice and June Russell, a faithful RLDS couple, invited me to stay with them during the summer, which I did. I had many long and cordial talks with Russ about the differences between our two churches, and a fond relationship grew between us.

While at Independence, I researched in the archives of the Jackson County “Memorial” Courthouse on the square where Bishop Edward Partridge had been tarred and feathered July 20, 1833. I spent considerable time researching in the Kansas City Library, in the huge courthouse in downtown Kansas City, and also in the courthouse at Liberty, Clay County. One day while researching in the courthouse in Independence, I met Bill Goff, a published historian on Jackson County's pioneers. In our conversation about the early settlers in Jackson County, he remarked, “The founding fathers of Jackson County were so damn crooked that the undertaker had to screw them in the ground to bury them.” He gave this as a sympathetic and

humorous explanation for the troubles the Saints experienced with those founding fathers in 1833.

After I lived with the Russells all summer, they invited my family to visit them in Independence and to stay for a week in the Mesle home while they were away on assignment at Kirtland, Ohio. Elder Carl Mesle was the presiding elder of the Stone Church congregation where RLDS President W. Wallace Smith worshipped, north of the Temple Lot dedicated by the Prophet Joseph in 1831. With concern about the beautiful and breakable glassware in the Mesle living room, Yvonne apologized to Sister Mesle for our little girls' (Christine's and Julie's) youthful vigor, hoping they wouldn't break anything. While of course still expecting us to be careful, Sister Mesle replied, "People are more important than things." Both the Mesles and the Russells trusted us and treated our children with warmth and friendship, and our family still talks about the kindness we received from them that summer.

We talked a great deal about history in our home, and during my years researching I tried to give each of my five children experiences associated with my work. For example, on one occasion before his mission, I took my son Steven with me to Missouri on an assignment to write an article for the *Ensign* magazine and showed him some of the sites usually passed over by Utah visitors. One site I took him to see was the place near Liberty where in 1958 Boyd Park discovered the skeletal remains of three members of Zion's Camp who had died of cholera with others in June 1834. Heber C. Kimball said that some of the dead had been buried "in a little bluff by the side of a small stream that emptied into Rush Creek." This was the exact place where Boyd Park had found the skeletons, which his cattle had kicked up in his feed yard. The bones were later identified by the University of Missouri at Columbia and reinterred in the RLDS Mound Grove Cemetery in Independence. In October 1997, officers of the Missouri Mormon Frontier Foundation asked me to dedicate a monument in the cemetery where the skeletons rested, in honor



of the fifteen Latter-day Saints who had died of cholera. In giving my children some special travel-to-an-important-place experience, I wanted these things to matter in their lives.

**BAUGH:** Let's talk now about your years at the LDS Institute adjacent to the University of Utah. Talk about some of your colleagues and associates, your ups and downs—anything you'd like to share along those lines. What were some of your sentiments about the faculty and your life at the Salt Lake Institute of Religion?

**PARKIN:** Those were happy years for me. I enjoyed teaching at the Salt Lake Institute with such good men, and learning from them continued my education. I took a few classes from T. Edgar Lyon, who taught for about ten more years after I arrived as a teacher while he was also working as historian for Nauvoo Restoration. He taught at the Salt Lake Institute longer than any other teacher. (I understand that I may have followed him as second longest, with my twenty-seven years there and my additional ten years there as a volunteer teacher.) I also took several courses from Reed C. Durham, who succeeded Joe J. Christensen as director. Brother Durham was a superb teacher and a very popular one, who showed enormous breadth and depth in the wide range of subjects he taught. His most popular courses seemed to be specialty courses in LDS history—keeping students informed of new papers being published by the Arrington team in the new Church Writing Division and by others. I enjoyed attending his classes. He was also an excellent administrator, as Joe Christensen had been. Meanwhile, there was compatibility and mutual respect within the faculty. While members of our teaching staff changed a great deal over the years, the core faculty members from my early years there remained stable: Durham, Lyon, Dale C. LeCheminant, U. Carlyle Hunsaker, C. Kent Dunford, Gilbert W. Scharffs, Dean Jarman, and Calvin P. Rudd. Soon, a few other teachers who taught there for many years joined us: namely, J. Lewis Taylor, Edward J. Brandt, Dee W. Hadley, Paul A. Hanks, Howard C. Searle, and a

few others. I don't think the Church had a more faithful body of disciples than these brethren at the Salt Lake Institute of Religion; they respected the Church leaders and dearly loved the Lord, as I did. As directors of the Institute, besides Joe J. Christensen and Reed C. Durham, there were J. Lewis Taylor, Gilbert W. Scharffs, and then the highly popular David A. Christensen. Also, many other excellent teachers came later, such as S. Michael Wilcox, Robert J. Woodford, L. Dean Marriott, and others. But I want to make the point strongly of the faithfulness and goodwill of the faculty, because once in a while a complaint circulated from downtown about this or that teacher. The rumors included sentiments that were little more than someone having a different opinion from the Brethren on something, but such rumors were never helpful.

**BAUGH:** Give us some of the dynamics of the faculty at the Institute of Religion at the U.

**PARKIN:** First, I would say that I never heard a word of criticism from any of my fellow teachers against the General Authorities. In fact, over the years a number of our teachers themselves became General Authorities, including Joe J. Christensen, John M. Madsen, and Jeffrey R. Holland, each of whom was called to the First Quorum of Seventy. Later, of course, Brother Holland became a member of the Quorum of the Twelve. Moreover, many of the teachers themselves became bishops, stake presidents, and mission presidents, and served the Church in the temple and in other ways. Over the years, the faculty worked together smoothly with much brotherhood and spirituality, including attending the temple together each fall as we began the academic year. However, sometimes there were things that created competition and even a little tension. After Leonard Arrington was sustained Church historian in 1972, he soon presented an agenda of books to the Brethren for publication by the faithful team of young historians in his History Writing Division in the newly organized Church Historical Department. As the books and articles

were published, some of our faculty, including myself, favored their works for their increased understanding of our wonderful Church, but a few of the faculty members were critical of them. This was emphasized especially when certain General Authorities expressed cautious concerns about these writings. The same division occurred among us in partisan expressions about the Mormon History Association, an organization Arrington had established, which some saw as a threat to orthodoxy. Most of the faculty, however, seemed indifferent to these two issues because they had not been trained in history, they taught in unrelated fields (scriptures, doctrine, courtship and marriage, etc.), they had not read the new publications, or they weren't interested in attending the MHA annual conferences. Eventually, years later, Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Seventy attended some of the annual history meetings, adding a tacit support for the organization. Later still, when Church historian Marlin K. Jensen began attending meetings, the reputation of the MHA seemed to improve as it continued to build a brotherhood among the Mormon historical community, the Community of Christ Church (RLDS), other restoration churches, and the wider Joseph Smith family. Even the attendance at MHA meetings by detractors like Reverend Wesley Walters, for example, helped to build friendship instead of animosity.

Some of the presidents of the MHA have been among the most faithful members of the Church. A few of its presidents, who served one-year terms since its beginning in 1966, besides Arrington, T. Edgar Lyon, and Reed C. Durham, were from BYU, including Milton V. Backman, David J. Whittaker, and Donald Q. Cannon. Others from our Church Historical Department, such as Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Ronald W. Walker, have led the association. Several Mormon-friendly historians from outside the Church have been elected as president, including Jan Shipps, Mario S. DePillis, and recently Bill MacKinnon. And some from the RLDS Church served as its head, including Roger D. Launius, a nationally prominent historian, and Richard P. Howard, RLDS Church historian.

Additionally, besides the friendly non-Mormon Jan Shipps, several other women have served as president, including Carol Cornwall Madsen and Jill Mulvay Derr, two level-headed and faithful Latter-day Saint historians and the authors of books on the Relief Society and on Utah pioneer women. They all met the challenge of preventing the association from becoming too liberal.

As Church historian, Brother Arrington provided guidance and leadership to historians in other ways. Again, referring to my earlier days, he helped me in my dissertation research. He also gave approved researchers easier access to sources in the Church Archives than had been given previously. I spent a half-year sabbatical researching material for my dissertation a few years after Leonard was appointed Church Historian, and his friendly policies gave me dream access to documents previously restricted or difficult to get, as was the situation during my master's degree. This proved very beneficial not only to my dissertation, but also later in my work on *The Joseph Smith Papers*. While I worked on the Joseph Smith Papers Project in the Church Archives, I also used some of the material in my own files at home that I had photocopied years before. Without these files from early journals, my work on the Joseph Smith Papers Project would have been considerably slowed. I will briefly note that after I retired, the University of Utah's Marriott Library asked me to contribute my research and teaching files to the school's Special Collection Library, and I was pleased to do so. After they were cataloged, they filled ninety archival boxes. However, because I felt that my copies of the research documents from the Church Archives were restricted, I did not include them in my gift to the University of Utah.

Let me add an experience that I had with Brother Arrington, who expressed his attitude about his work in the History Writing Division of the Church. In January 1976, while I was finishing my dissertation, I visited Leonard in his office in the east wing of the Church's then new high-rise office building. He told me he felt keenly that his calling as Church historian was a spiritual calling, and despite

all of the complaints about his work, the Spirit supported him and his writers in what they were doing. “If I didn’t feel the Spirit was with us,” he said, “I don’t think it would be worth it.” I loved him for his touching statement. Some of the writers who helped him, besides Assistant Church Historians Davis Bitton and James B. Allen, were Dean C. Jessee, Ronald W. Walker, William G. Hartley, Glen M. Leonard, Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, and others—all faithful Saints, as far as I knew them over the years. Yet, with the good that Brother Arrington and his writing staff accomplished, they were mistrusted by a few of the General Authorities with whom I spoke or whom I heard speak about them, and also by a few of my peers at the Salt Lake Institute, as I stated above. I believe that if the Brethren had been fully united behind President Spencer W. Kimball, who seemed supportive of the New Mormon History, my colleagues at the Salt Lake Institute would also have been united. But, with an atmosphere of misgivings, problems sometimes arose.

**BAUGH:** Can you give some examples?

**PARKIN:** Perhaps the most dramatic one was an issue about our director, Reed C. Durham. Although it did not pertain directly to Leonard’s work, it reflected the spirit of the times. Dr. Durham was elected president of the Mormon History Association in 1973, and at the conference banquet held at Nauvoo, Illinois, the following year, he delivered his presidential address. It was titled “Is There No Help for the Widow’s Son?”—a talk about Joseph Smith and Masonry. It was an intriguing paper, which I heard with my son Bradford, who was with me at the conference just before his mission. After the talk that evening, Brad and I discussed it late into the night, and I answered some of his questions. The next morning, near the end of the Sunday devotional hour after some had already left the conference to return home, time was provided for those who wanted to stand to express sentiments of faith or comments of brotherhood. At the end, my son surprisingly stood and expressed his appreciation for Reed Durham

regarding his talk the night before. He thanked him for his knowledge and intelligence, while still believing in Joseph Smith as a prophet. It was now clear to me that my son had been strengthened by Reed's address and also by our late-hour conversation. I don't know whether his comments influenced Reed, but after Bradford sat down, Reed instantly stood and bore his testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, which he had not done the night before in his academic paper. It was a fitting end to the conference. However, upon returning home, we soon heard rumors that some at Ricks College and at BYU who had attended the conference didn't approve of Durham's address. Consequently, Brother Durham was soon interviewed by President Kimball in Salt Lake City. Although he remained perfectly silent with his colleagues about the interview and its repercussions, we noticed that Reed never again taught Church history, which he had been keen to do. What an unfortunate loss to the students. He did, however, continue to serve as director of the institute.

Brother Joe Christensen helped me avoid a similar problem. A historian who wanted to publish a book on plural marriage using different authors for the book's chapters asked me if I would write the Kirtland chapter in the book. I expected no problem because in my thesis I had dealt with the Fanny Alger and Joseph Smith "marriage" in Kirtland. Moreover, a few years earlier, I had written a chapter on Kirtland in a Church history book for the RLDS Church's Graceland College at Lamoni, Iowa. An administrator at the school had asked Leonard Arrington to select several historians from our Church to help their historians write the volume. So I wrote the chapter on the Kirtland period of the Church and gave it an appropriate Utah Mormon perspective. The book was published under the title *The Restoration Movement* and used in the school's religion classes at Graceland. Since my writing the chapter had created no complaint from Seminaries and Institutes, and I expected none, I naturally anticipated there would be no problem writing the Kirtland chapter on plural marriage. However, Joe J. Christensen, then administrator

of the Church's Seminaries and Institutes, came to my office and said, "If I were you, Max, I wouldn't write that chapter." I appreciated his counsel and understood the implications, so I didn't write it. He was obviously trying to help me keep my slate clean, and I thanked him.

**BAUGH:** Interesting, but did you ever have problems or complaints come your way?

**PARKIN:** Yes, I did. There were never any problems from my teachings in the classroom, or otherwise with my students. I always tried to teach the truth in a context of faith in whatever subject I taught and to do the same in any public address I gave. I am a conservative, theologically, and a moderate to progressive in reporting history. However, a complaint was filed against me after a fireside talk I gave to an Orem high priests group. I apparently spoke on history in a way that upset a high priest who had been a former BYU librarian working in Salt Lake City, a man of considerable influence. Consequently, I was told by one of my downtown supervisors, who firmly reprimanded me, to report to President Kimball, which shocked me. Besides, I was embarrassed that the President of the Church had to spend time on what I thought, at worst, was a trivial matter, and I was apprehensive of the consequences. When I arrived at President Kimball's office, his secretary, Arthur Haycock, interviewed me about the talk. Representing some of the material I had used, I referred to a quote that I had taken from Brother Haycock's own recent address at the institute; simply ignoring it, he wanted me to agree that I would not give the talk again, and then I could go. I agreed. He was kind. He gave some good advice, and that was the end of the matter.

Another complaint, one more serious, resulted from an interview by a history major at the University of Utah. The student, an honors student and a returned missionary, was writing a senior paper on the New Mormon History and its historians. To help his paper, he interviewed Reed Durham, Calvin Rudd, and me at the institute. I

responded to many questions the student posed to help him, particularly to one about an address given by President Ezra Taft Benson, President of the Twelve, against Dr. Arrington and his team in the Historical Department. President Benson gave the talk in the assembly hall to seminary and institute teachers in the fall of 1976 at our annual “Night with a General Authority.” The address was given about a month after the book *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* was published, which had been written by Arrington’s two assistants, James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard. The book was to be our standard one-volume history of the Church. Our director at the institute had recently placed the book on our shelves for sale to our students, and our Church history teachers had begun to promote it, including me. The authors intended the book to be an informative, faith-promoting work for Latter-day Saint readers. President Benson, however, objected to some of its contents. (Later, a confirmed rumor said that his secretary had read it and fed his own objections to President Benson.) At the meeting, President Benson articulated his protests against the book and against the church historian with considerable feeling. James Allen later said that President Kimball read the book and liked it, as did Wendell J. Ashton, president of Deseret Book, its publisher. I suggested to the senior student that perhaps many of the teachers in the audience were new or young and were not aware of the specific book, or of the historians the speaker was talking about, because he neither identified the book by name nor its authors. I suggested, too, that many in the audience may have thought the speaker was talking in the abstract against liberal historians generally; to put it more directly, I said that many in the audience did not know what he was talking about. Of course, many clearly did. My son Kevin, who had recently returned from his mission to France and who had accompanied me that night, whispered to me after the address, “Dad, now what are you going to do?” He understood the significance of the address in my approval of the book and in my finding no fault, even in the specific examples to which the speaker had objected.



Possibly the speaker was unfamiliar with certain realities of the early American culture referred to in the book.

The following morning, the book was removed from our institute's bookshelves and from those at Deseret Book. After the student finished his senior paper, unfortunately it got into the hands of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, anti-Mormon publishers, who printed it. When the members of the Church Board of Education (that is, the First Presidency and Twelve) read the Tanner publication, as Brother Christensen later told me they had, my job was on the line. Eventually, to resolve the issue and to get me away from the fishbowl of the Salt Lake Institute, I was offered a position to teach at BYU. This was a great relief, but again, my wife did not want to move, so Brother Christensen, as administrator, suggested that a letter of apology from me to the Brethren might suffice, which it did. I knew that Joe Christensen had to work out such problems as best he could while not losing the trust of the Brethren, because the seminaries and institutes of the Church were highly regarded by the Church leaders and were valuable to the Church's growth. Consequently, it was important not to harm their reputation, or, if necessary, to remove those who might be seen to do it harm. Although President Benson took the position that the book should never be reprinted, it soon returned to the shelves of Deseret Book and was later reprinted, unedited, during his own later administration. The authors told me that they were always willing to make any changes that President Benson desired, but he never requested any.

Was this all just a tempest in a teapot? Nevertheless, we learned in 1982 that without ceremony Leonard Arrington had been released as Church historian. We knew that some of my colleagues felt that they had won the contest against him and against us who believed in him and his work.

**BAUGH:** Would you like to talk about any other issues?

**PARKIN:** Yes, briefly. Following a MHA convention held at Snowbird, I was asked some questions by a reporter from *Christianity Today*, a weekly Protestant newsmagazine. When the magazine appeared on store shelves, my remarks upset some of the Quorum of the Twelve (on the Board of Education), and I was reprimanded by a downtown supervisor, not only for what I had said, but more so because I had said anything. I was told that such interviews should be left to the Church's Public Relations Department. This I understood and agreed to, but it had already created some consternation, and such complaints usually got into a teacher's file. What's more important, however, was an issue with one of my faithful earliest colleagues at the institute. He was a very popular and thoughtful teacher who was taken to task for accepting an invitation to read a paper at Sunstone Symposium, which, like MHA at that time, was not held in the favor of some of our leaders, and I personally kept Sunstone at a distance. The teacher was told by the central office that he shouldn't give the paper, which counsel he accepted. However, he wanted to give the inviting host an explanation for why he couldn't do it, but the supervisor said he could not give the reason. A problem arose from this difficulty and the teacher's new contract transferred him away from Salt Lake, a transfer he could not accept, so regrettably, he left the system and struggled to build a new career for himself.

**BAUGH:** You like to travel. Tell us some of your experiences.

**PARKIN:** When I was young, I did very little traveling, but I developed an early interest in geography. As a boy, I read a number of books on travel, including Richard Halliburton's *Book of Marvels* about foreign lands and books on the Seven Wonders of the World. Also, using colored pencils, I drew a portfolio of maps of countries like Spain, England, and others for my own delight, and I drew a large world map, which my father liked, which filled a wall in my bedroom. Thus I became interested in many peoples and places.

My travel interest, of course, was first expressed by my trip to Alaska and my mission to Hawaii, both of which at the time were territories of the United States. Other opportunities followed. In 1974, I became a BYU Travel Study director for a few years, a position that took me to England, Greece, and Israel with my son Kevin (eventually visiting Jerusalem several times), and to many US and LDS historical sites. Yvonne and I usually took members of our family with us when we visited places such as Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia; Salem and Plymouth, Massachusetts; and Church history sites. We traveled to Egypt, Morocco, Rome, and other Mediterranean places. Yvonne and I went to many wonderful American and foreign cities to attend MHA conferences, such as Canandaigua, New York (when Dean Jessee was MHA president); Honolulu, Hawaii; Montreal, Canada; Oxford, Liverpool, and London, England; Cardiff, Wales; Copenhagen, Denmark; and Oslo and Bergen, Norway, where Yvonne's father was born.

On one MHA trip, Dean and June Jessee and I ate curry in an Indian restaurant in Oslo, Norway, and Dean and I enjoyed a hamburger in what was at the time Russia's only McDonald's restaurant, located on the boulevard just north of Red Square in Moscow. I traveled with my son Steven to Hong Kong and Beijing, China, and with Yvonne to Tahiti, where Steven started his mission to the Maoris. I also had an informative trip with BYU's John Sorenson to Guatemala. Finally, Yvonne and I took a multination tour of Europe with others, ending in Romania, where we associated with a Latter-day Saint convert trying to be reconciled with her Greek Orthodox family in a village in the Carpathian Alps. We had a wonderful dinner with her Romanian family and peasant neighbors outdoors in their near-medieval farming village. While exchanging songs from each other's country and eating their different food, she hugged and shed tears of reconciliation with her previously estranged father. It was one of the fine spiritual experiences of our lives.

Another highlight journey occurred when Bill and DeAnn Sadleir organized Sea Trek in 2001. John Peterson of the Salt Lake Institute, one of Sea Trek's promoters and one of our more insightful Church history teachers, invited me to participate. Sea Trek was a sesquicentennial celebration of Latter-day Saint immigration from Scandinavia to Zion, symbolizing the historic earlier gathering by sea. We traveled in eight European tall sailing ships to ports in Denmark, Norway, Germany, and England. Before leaving, my stake president blessed me to serve as president of the Dutch sailing vessel *Swan*, where I directed the branch and lectured daily on board about early Mormon immigration to America. Many early Saints began their voyages in various ports; sailed to Hull, England; traveled overland to Liverpool, England; and then sailed across the Atlantic to Zion. Sea Trek tried to reenact those voyages. I organized the ship into an ecclesiastical branch and held LDS services on Sundays for the passengers and crew. The vessels sailed in formation on their two-week journey originating in the port of Esbjerg, Denmark, to the ports of Copenhagen, Oslo, Hamburg, Hull, Liverpool, and Portsmouth. From Portsmouth, England, the largest ship sailed across the Atlantic to New York City.

Meanwhile, because of my seasick propensities, I tried to be well prepared, but the *Swan* became separated early from the other ships because of a terrible storm in the North Sea. We were en route to Copenhagen, Denmark, our first port, where preparations were being made for a glorious state reception. After a few days of the storm, the ship's captain suggested that we bypass Copenhagen and sail to Göteborg, Sweden, a closer port, to wait out the storm, which would mean that we alone would miss the group celebration enjoyed by the other tall ships as they ceremonially arrived at Copenhagen. I took a vote of my very sick passengers. The vote was unanimous in favor of the closer port. I remember one passenger, Elder Ronald A. Rasband, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy, slowly

raising his hand from his sickbed in the ship's lounge to vote to go to Göteborg.

Both of my sons served as counselors in our ship's branch. Steven participated on the first half of the journey during the storm, and Bradford sailed on the second half, finishing in Portsmouth, England. At the completion of Sea Trek, we did some sightseeing in England. Bradford and I drove to Plymouth, where we located the inn where William Bradford, my son's namesake and an ancestor, and other *Mayflower* Pilgrims spent their last night in England in 1620 before they crossed the Atlantic to America. Elder John Hart and Sister Shauna Hart, of my South Cottonwood ward, who were serving as information missionaries in Hull, England, helped there with Sea Trek activities for the Church. Elder Hart ended his mission and sailed across the Atlantic in Sea Trek's largest tall ship on its last segment to New York City, to be greeted, not with ceremony as expected, but with the smoldering remains of the World Trade Center a few days after 9/11. Brother Hart is now serving as my first assistant in our high priests group in our South Cottonwood ward. I make reference to the above journeys because they so well helped fulfill my boyhood travel dreams.

**BAUGH:** When did you retire?

**PARKIN:** I retired in 1995 at age sixty-five. Some of my colleagues occasionally retired at earlier ages, which I never understood, because I loved to teach the students. After I retired, as mentioned earlier, I continued for more than a decade as a volunteer teacher at the institute.

**BAUGH:** Following your official retirement from CES, you were asked to be a volume editor for the Joseph Smith Papers Project. How did that happen?

**PARKIN:** Yes, but first a word on what led up to it. When I retired from full-time teaching, I talked with Yvonne about what

I would do with my time. We agreed that I should take courses in watercoloring and in golf and fill my free time with these activities. However, this and teaching as a volunteer at the institute did not fully occupy me, so I applied to be a service missionary at the Church History Museum. I was put to work researching early Mormon land records in Kirtland to assist in the restoration of old Mormon Kirtland, a project under way by the Church. I spent a year and a half working on this Kirtland research project while associating at the museum with Dr. Mark L. Staker, the lead Church anthropologist on the Kirtland restoration project. He was also working on his book about the early Saints at Kirtland (*Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations*, 2009).

In May 2003, President Gordon B. Hinckley dedicated the restored Mormon Kirtland village in Ohio just before the MHA annual meeting was held there the following week. I attended the dedication in the crowded Kirtland LDS chapel and visited with Milt Bachman, my old mentor there on a mission, who was honored for his work on Kirtland the following week during an inspiring MHA session held in the Kirtland Temple, where he also addressed the packed temple audience as guests of the Community of Christ church, owners of the temple.

Meanwhile, in August 2000, while on my Kirtland research mission in Salt Lake, Richard L. Bushman invited me to join him, Dean Jessee, and others to work on the Joseph Smith Papers Project. Besides me, they asked Robert J. Woodford, also of the Salt Lake Institute, to help, but they soon teamed me with you [Alex Baugh]. Bushman and Jessee would serve as senior editors of the project, and you and I would serve as historians and volume editors on our part of the project. Ron Esplin succeeded Leonard Arrington as director of the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute of Latter-day Saint History at BYU, the institutional custodian of the Joseph Smith Papers Project at the time, and Dr. Esplin would serve as the Papers Project's managing director. In a few months, Jenny Lund of the

Church History Museum released me from my mission to allow me more time in my new assignment. (Any time I had available for painting or golf quickly ended.) A year later, President Gordon B. Hinckley officially authorized the project to serve under the Church Historical Department. Dean C. Jessee, Leonard J. Arrington, and President Hinckley are the significant action heroes that made possible the miracle of what the Joseph Smith Papers Project is fully becoming. The underwriting assistance to the project provided by Larry H. Miller is also very important. After so many years of struggle, Dean Jessee's long-held dream was to be realized. Former resistance to this new front in writing Mormon history seemed to fade in the face of President Hinckley's support and the dedication in 2009 of the new Church History Library in Salt Lake City, the project's new home.

The Joseph Smith Papers Project is divided into several different groups—journals, revelations, histories, documents, and legal papers. When you, Alex, and I were paired, we were given the task of coediting documents for three volumes (1834–38) of the Documents series, and we have worked together for several years on the project. Our volumes now await final editing and eventual publication. Further, *The Joseph Smith Papers* documentary series produced by KJZZ-TV (owned by the Larry Miller Group) has given the project a popular television forum for programs about Joseph Smith's history. Numerous scholars have participated in the filming of the documentaries—you and I, along with many of our colleagues, such as Ron Esplin, Ron Barney, Richard Anderson, Gordon Madsen, and a host of others. Glenn Rawson is the narrator. As several volumes of the papers now have been published, interest continues. This says a lot about the vision and hope held by Dean Jessee and Leonard Arrington, which are now being realized!

**BAUGH:** Talk to me about the book *Missouri*, volume 4 of the Sacred Places series, which you worked on with LaMar C. Berrett.

**PARKIN:** I spent several years with LaMar Berrett writing that book. It is one volume of LaMar's six-volume work on the sites and histories of early Mormon places. Our volume on Missouri is more than just a book on sites. It treats the history of the sites based on original research. Of the book's six hundred pages, I did the first half and LaMar did the second half. He coordinated the volume, but we each did our half of the book separately.

**BAUGH:** What do you feel is your most important contribution to the field of Mormon history?

**PARKIN:** While I did some writing of Mormon history, I have principally been a teacher. I respect those among my peers who have contributed to our historical literature in helping us better understand our great heritage. Of them, I note particularly Dean Jessee and his works. Others of my associates who wrote include Ron Walker, who used to teach at the Salt Lake Institute and is one of our better writers. Other writers include Larry Porter, Ken Godfrey, Leland Gentry, Reed Durham, Lyndon Cook, Howard Searle, Gilbert Scharffs, Ed Brandt, Kent Dunford, John Peterson, and Robert Woodford. These writers all contributed to our historical literature and were among the colleagues with whom I taught or had close academic roots. I have tried to do my part also. I have written several articles in professional journals, in books, in Church magazines, and in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, as well as those noted previously. I also presented papers at BYU's Sperry Symposium and at MHA conferences.

To answer your question, the most significant thing I have done is to have written an article in *BYU Studies* on the United Firm. The article, "Joseph Smith and the United Firm: The Growth and Decline of the Church's First Master Plan of Business and Finance, Ohio and Missouri, 1832–1834" (*BYU Studies* 46, no. 3, 2007) and its ideas, I hope, will have an influence. Knowledge of the United Firm in Mormon history is not new with my article. But the marked differences that I make between that institution directed by the Prophet



Joseph Smith that he named the United Firm and that of the “fictitious” title and nonexistent United Order is more than just a word. (It was Orson Pratt who used the word “fictitious.”) The purpose of the United Firm is suggested in the title above. At a *Papers* editors’ meeting at Larry Miller’s house in Salt Lake in 2008, Jack Welch, editor of *BYU Studies*, recommended the article to Larry Miller as an appropriate read for a person interested in Joseph Smith’s early financial enterprises. At any rate, I would be pleased if it helps Mormon historians better understand that aspect of our past.

**BAUGH:** Any other final observations or comments?

**PARKIN:** I want to say once again that I am grateful to my wife, Yvonne, because if it had not been for her being baptized by West Belnap and the events of those early years, I probably would not have had a career in Church education with all of its blessings. I believe that heaven’s wisdom and knowledge have indeed flowed unto me from its portals, as the patriarch said. Something seemed to have been helping me along the way at important turning points and moved me through the journey I took in Church education. It has proven to be a good journey for Yvonne and me. Moreover, in traveling that path I have learned some essential things about our divine Church and about myself. Most significantly, I have learned that the most important things in life are values and relationships—that is, godly values and noble relationships. These are life’s supreme blessings.