



*Stanley B. Kimball*

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INTERVIEW BY MAURINE CARR WARD



STANLEY B. KIMBALL is a great-great-grandson of Heber C. Kimball. He graduated from Columbia University with a PhD in 1959 and was a professor of history at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, where he taught for four decades. He is the author of four books and numerous articles of Mormon history, including *Heber C. Kimball: Mormon Patriarch and Pioneer*, which won a best book award from the Mormon History Association. He served as historian of the Mormon Pioneer Trail Foundation for many years. In 2001, he retired from SIUE and moved to St. George, Utah. Two years later, he died of cancer at the age of seventy-six.

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Historic Sites Foundation (2000–6) and is now an independent family and LDS researcher. She was editor and author of *Winter Quarters: The 1846–1848 Life Writings of Mary Haskin Parker Richards*, for which she received two awards; the first Handcart Prize awarded by the David W. and Beatrice C. Evans Biography Award Committee at Utah State University for a work of merit, by an emerging author, that enriches our understanding of Mormon Country, and the Francis M. and Emily Chipman Award for Best New Book at the Mormon History Association meeting in Omaha, Nebraska. She also authored several articles in *Mormon Historical Studies* and was on a committee to research and write *Hyrum Stake of Zion: The First One Hundred Years, April 28, 1901–December 8, 2002*.

#### THE INTERVIEW

**WARD:** I talked to a lot of people before I came to this interview to find out how they perceive you, Stan. You're viewed as a Mormon historian, a teacher, a proud descendant of Heber C. Kimball, and a trail activist. I have heard you called a maverick and the granddaddy of the Mormon trails and the Western trails. I'm interviewing you today to find out, in your own words, who you really are.

**KIMBALL:** I plead guilty to all of those and other less flattering descriptions of myself. I've been around seventy-five years, and most of those years I've traded a bit on being either the grandson of J. Golden Kimball by marriage or my great-uncle by blood. And if I've ever gotten in trouble with stake presidents or bishops or anyone, I would just say, "Well, what the hell did you expect from someone who's descended from J. Golden Kimball?" Or I would say, "Hey, President, I am only anxiously engaged in a good cause." They would usually laugh, and the whole thing would just disappear; then I went my way, and they went their way. I guess because I was a hard, hard worker and more or less a nice guy I've just been left alone all these years. Nobody has ever denied me anything in the Church Archives.

I hear horror stories all the time, but it's never affected me. Maybe I didn't ask to see the right things. I don't know, and I don't care. I was only interested in what I wanted to see, and they always gave it to me, even when they had motion sensors and guard dogs and you had to show your driver's license to get past the gate. I am very pleased with the way I have been treated since I started out doing work in the archives, certainly by the late forties. That's a long time, and we have had nothing but pleasant, helpful relationships and the greatest people in the world to work with. I want that in the record someplace because I know other people have had trouble. So, yes, I've been a maverick and one thing and another, but somehow I keep my temple recommend; I'm in a bishopric now, and the Church still accepts my tithing.

**WARD:** Let's start at the beginning, Stan. I am always interested in how people get to where they are, so just briefly tell us a bit about where you were born and about some of your early life.

**KIMBALL:** Well, I was born in Farmington, Utah, and there raised by my grandparents. My mother got divorced really quickly and traveled. My childhood was absolutely idyllic. I couldn't have asked for more love and kindness and friendship and all those wonderful things that make life worthwhile. My grandmother taught me early on a very important lesson. She said, "Yes, Stanley, we are a chosen people, a royal people, a peculiar people—but, Stanley, don't be too damn peculiar." I started out lucky and just kind of stayed that way. When I was fourteen, my mother remarried, we moved to Denver, and a whole new life opened up. I went from Farmington, which was 99 percent Mormon—a village—to the big city of Denver, where it was 99.999 percent non-Mormon and where I was the only Mormon in my junior high school. Pretty soon I caught on that I was the only Mormon most of these people were ever going to know. So, I had to watch myself; I'd better be a nice guy. That is how I started out becoming a terminally nice guy, and that is because I didn't want

any shenanigans to reflect back on my people. What they thought of me, well, that's one thing; but what they thought of my people is quite a different thing, and I was very, very careful about that. Then I went into World War II. I didn't do much. I fought the battle of Sheppard Field, Texas, mainly, but I did enlist in the United States Army Air Force. I am very proud of that. I have always been very proud that I enlisted instead of being drafted. Then I went on a mission, came back, finished up an MA that wasn't worth anything, got the only job I was remotely fit for (running an arts council in Winston-Salem, North Carolina), and met my bride, Violet, down there. I got tired of running an arts council, so I took off and assaulted the Olympian heights of Columbia University, where I wasn't prepared at all but somehow made it. I got my doctorate and then, as everybody knows, became rich, wealthy, and famous.

**WARD:** All three for sure.

**KIMBALL:** Yes, oh yes. I made enough, not too much, but we've been happy.

**WARD:** Can we backtrack a minute? You talked about going on a mission, and I have heard that you were in Czechoslovakia.

**KIMBALL:** Yes.

**WARD:** Tell me what happened while you were there.

**KIMBALL:** Well, I arrived about October 19, 1948, with three other companions, and we went to work and everything was fine. We were the last ones in; the first week I was there was the beginning of the end, although I did stay about eighteen months before the end finally came. We worked pretty hard, too, because we had a sense that our days were numbered. We weren't very popular with the government, to say the least. I think one of the main reasons they tolerated us was the money we brought in. We contributed a significant amount of hard money to their not-exactly-worthless currency. Anyway, I

loved it, and the people loved us. I had a wonderful time, and I felt that we were at the right place doing the right thing at the right time.

But then they wanted us out, and so they started applying pressure on a couple of elders here and a couple of elders there. Their permission to remain was not extended. They put two of our brethren in jail to underscore the fact that they really did want us out. And they said, “These men are going to stay in jail until you are all out of here.” We left February 22, 1950—got on a train and left. Before we did we had a final church meeting. I was in Prague, and there wasn’t a dry eye in the house. All of us elders got up, and I think they did the same thing I did, which was to try and give them something to remember us by, a favorite scripture or something like that. And then as fast as it began, it was over. There were several others like me who had only been there eighteen months; we were transferred to an English-speaking mission.

Just before we left, President Toronto came up to us—our Czech president, President Wallace Toronto—and said, “Elders, you’ve had a real tough time here, so I have notified your British Mission president to expect you within a month.” Well, we headed straight for Switzerland and then did the grand tour. Went down all over Italy and France and Holland and Belgium and just had a wonderful time wandering around all by ourselves. Somehow we stayed out of trouble and nothing ever happened. We all turned up where we were supposed to turn up thirty days later, but can you imagine that going on today? You can hardly go to the bathroom today without your companion. There we were running around all over. I don’t know where the money came from. It was just so cheap; we just did it. Never worried about money at all.

**WARD:** So where did you end up serving the rest of your mission?

**KIMBALL:** I went out to the mission home in London, and my mission president was Stayner Richards, who was the brother of the General Authority Richards. I forget his name right now.

WARD: Stephen L.

KIMBALL: Yes, yes. That's right. Stephen L. Well, anyway, he was a great guy too. Loved him. And when he, in the little interview he had with the four of us, found out I was a descendant of Heber C. Kimball, he sent me immediately to Preston. So I went directly to Preston, and he had just assigned another missionary there a week before. He immediately transferred him to Ireland because he knew that I would work very hard to honor my great-grandfather. And I did work very hard. He was absolutely right. And that was just a pleasure. I enjoyed every minute of that because it was the power of place, the spirit of the locale of my great-grandfather. I couldn't have asked for a better mission. I served under two entirely different mission presidents. President Toronto couldn't have run the British Mission well, and Stayner Richards could never have run the Czech Mission at all. What did that teach me? Well, it taught me that there were different management styles appropriate to different circumstances, which was new to me. All told, I lived in Europe over five years, including a fellowship in Germany with my family for a year.

WARD: I think it was Mike Landon who told me that you did your dissertation on Slavs in western America. Does that have anything to do with serving your mission where you did?

KIMBALL: Well, yes. Let's back up just a bit. When I got off my mission, I finished up an MA in what today we would call a master of fine arts. There was no such thing in 1950, but anyway, that's what I did in 1950–51. Frankly, it wasn't worth a damn. The only job that I was halfway fit for just happened to come along. They wanted someone cheap and unmarried to be executive director for this arts council thing in Winston-Salem. It just happened to be tailor-made for what hit-or-miss talents I had put together over the years. And that turned out to be a stroke of luck. I guess I could even say a blessing because that's where I met my wife and where we had two kids.

Then eventually we went to New York and a whole new life opened up there. Well, the reason I wanted to go to Columbia was because they had a program on East Central Europe. That's where I'd spent my mission, so I went up and I got into it, and as soon as I got into it I realized I was nowhere near prepared for Columbia University. I never worked so hard in my life to just stay in that place and eventually get my doctorate. My dissertation was on the history of the Czech National Theater, which incidentally was published. Now in those days, the best thing that could happen to a graduate student was to have your dissertation published. I did not do a dissertation on Slavs in Utah. I got a Rockefeller Grant to study Slavs in Utah. I spent one summer there, and I very quickly found out that the only Slavs in Utah who had organized much or who had done much as groups were the South Slavs in our mining and smelting areas. So I was up in Helper and Hiawatha and Carbon County, Utah, and all of those places. I put together a study that was published and took all of the information I had to the American Studies Center, I think it is called, at the University of Utah, and they were delighted to get it. It looked good on my record, and I loved the Slavic people.

**WARD:** We talked about you going into history, but why did you choose history?

**KIMBALL:** I've asked myself that a hundred times, and the answer is always because I wasn't fit for anything else. History was the last thing I attempted to make it in. I was absolutely worthless in any of the sciences, and the social sciences didn't interest me at all. I was interested in music and drama and art—the fine arts interested me greatly—and so I kind of willy-nilly studied cultural history. But anyway, when it came time to sign up at Columbia, the only way into the program on East Central Europe was through an official discipline: sociology, economics, philology, linguistics, history—the standard disciplines. So, for the first time in my life, I had to do something besides just take a course because I wanted to take the program. That's why



my education, frankly, was very hit or miss. I just loved everything, which is the same thing as saying that I don't love anything. But anyway, I had to make a choice right then and there, and it was a toss-up between philology and history, and then I said, "Oh, no, philologists take themselves too seriously; I could never be a philologist." So I said, "Well, there's only one thing left—history." As soon as I got into it, I loved it. But I had two kids before I finally found my forte, shall we say, my calling. And I stayed in cultural history. So, actually, all of this hit-or-miss stuff I'd done way back when eventually fit it in. But, no, I had no great enlightenment. The only direction I had was my patriarchal blessing. It said, "Stanley, we urge you, bless you to make, to become a teacher in life." Well, I've never known whether that meant Sunday School teacher or just being a good example or whether it meant real teaching, and I just assumed it meant any and all of the above. That gave me great comfort when I said, "I'm going to get a doctorate and teach and fulfill my patriarchal blessing."

**WARD:** But you did teach?

**KIMBALL:** Oh, heavens. I taught for forty-three years.

**WARD:** Forty-three years?

**KIMBALL:** Forty-three years! I loved every minute of it. You see, in this so-called MFA of mine, the only thing about it that was worth much was that I had a concentration in theater. And I wrote some plays and did some acting and one thing and another. I found out that I love to perform. I love to get up on the stage and do most anything.

**WARD:** That must be part of your J. Golden Kimball inheritance.

**KIMBALL:** But to me, as I've told a few other people on occasion, everything is performance. I just love to speak in Church. I love to be asked to speak in Church. When I speak, they'll ask, "Brother

Kimball, will you give us a talk next week?" I say, "No, but I'll try and deliver a sermon." They don't know what to make of that, and I don't much care. So then I get up and I take a text and say, "I'm happy to be with you in divine services here in the chapel and at the pulpit, and my text for today is . . ." I just do that to kind of shake them up a little bit. I want them to stay awake while I'm talking, and if I start out that way, that signals that something's coming that's not going to be what they get—for better or for worse—every Sunday. Teaching was performing. My whole life is performance. And it's paid off pretty well. People seem to enjoy what I do, and if I can help them understand themselves or history, that's what I enjoy doing.

**WARD:** Well, a teacher who cannot perform or who is not interesting probably does not teach, because nobody will listen.

**KIMBALL:** That's a good point. I want to tell you a funny little story. When I was at Columbia, even before I had taken my orals, I became an instructor. That was unheard of; let me tell you how it happened. One of my professors of economic history, Professor Cluff, like a lot of people throughout my lifetime, made gentle fun of polygamy. When they found out I was a Mormon, I'd hear all these old jokes and the dumb questions they would ask me over and over again. Well, part of being a professional nice guy was to joke with them and laugh with them and give them an answer, and maybe it's a flippant answer, maybe it's a serious answer. For heaven's sakes, don't embarrass them by acting like some kind of jackass. So I would usually just roll with the punches, and pretty soon this got to be kind of a thing with him. He liked to have me around just to poke gentle fun at me, which I didn't mind at all, as I've already said. He also liked to drink, and he kept spiritus frumenti in his filing cabinets. After certain affairs, he would invite a select group to his office for a snort. He knew I didn't drink, but he always invited me just so he could have some fun kidding me about Mormonism. Well, most of the people he brought into his office for these little party things were the star scholars and

students around there—the cream of the crop. I was just comic relief, but they didn't know that. The guy who ran the instructorship thing saw me at all these things with Cluff, and so he thought I must be one of Cluff's fair-haired boys. So I got the job strictly because I would go to parties and could enjoy the banter on Mormon subjects.

**WARD:** So you believe that teaching is acting?

**KIMBALL:** Yes, performance.

**WARD:** Okay, performance. Tell me about your teaching career.

**KIMBALL:** I got my doctorate, my union card, and I had to sell it. The highest bidder turned out to be Southern Illinois University in greater St. Louis, which was a new university, and they had to pay good money to get people to come there. Well, that suited me just fine because I had to start somewhere, and they were paying approximately one thousand dollars a year more for newly minted PhDs than was standard, and back in 1959 a thousand dollars was real money. So, anyway, they offered me seven hundred a month, and I wasn't sure how in the world I was going to spend that much. Anyway, we went there and stayed forty-one years. I often wondered whether it was because I really enjoyed it or because I was unemployable anywhere else. They treated me so well I never really tried much to leave, however. Before I got there I had taught at Columbia University, which we've already mentioned, and I also taught courses at CCNY, the College of the City of New York, which looked good on my résumé. I taught a summer at BYU. I taught a summer at Washington University in St. Louis. I taught a summer at Vienna. So I did move around, but my home base never changed. Research money was all over the place, as were assistants and anything I wanted; they let me have it because I produced. I was very well paid to do exactly as I pleased. It just happened that what pleased me is what pleased them. You can't ask for a better deal than that.

Perhaps the greatest example of that is when I was hired to teach Eastern European history, which I did for more than twenty years. But I also got involved immediately in Mormon history because I always studied Mormon history wherever I was. When I was in Prague, I studied a little bit there. In England I studied it there, and in New York I studied it there. All right, I was in Illinois, and I wanted to study it there, so I put in a research request to work on the Mormons in Illinois. Well, somebody came up and said, “Look, Kimball, do all this you want, but do it on your own time and your own money because you’re here to do Eastern European stuff.” But the chair of that committee said, “Wait a minute. He wants to study Mormons in Illinois. This is an Illinois university, and an Illinois university should be supportive of that.” So, for forty years they financed both Eastern Europe and Mormon history in general. I’ve had colleagues who were never allowed to use a letterhead; they were not allowed to type a personal letter on their company computers or typewriters. They had to do all that at home. Of course, I used school letterheads for everything, and I used university machines for everything and nobody ever said anything about it. But I simply produced, and that’s what they wanted. So that was a marvelous time in my life, and I have no regrets. I’ve been kind of a lucky guy.

**WARD:** We talked in one of the past issues about your Mormon collection at Southern Illinois University. Can you tell us a little bit more about being involved with that?

**KIMBALL:** The first thing I should tell you is that I was a workaholic stuck in the Midwest. I lived in the Midwest forty-one years, but I never cared for it. My life was centered on my church, my family, and the university. What was outside the university really didn’t matter a whole lot. So, what was the question?

**WARD:** The Mormon registry.

**KIMBALL:** Oh, yes. So, being a workaholic, I always had to have something, two or three things, going at once, and I just decided that I was going to collect primary sources on the history of the Mormons in Illinois, anywhere I could find them. I knew I'd never get originals. I wanted microfilm. Or in a few instances, Xerox copies. I wrote hundreds of letters.

**WARD:** On your letterhead?

**KIMBALL:** Yes, on my letterhead, to institutions all over, telling them what I was doing, that I was working on a master list of primary source materials on the Mormons in Illinois from 1839 to 1846. Well, I was amazed at the answers that came back. And I said, "I don't want your originals; I just want microfilm copies, and we will place on them whatever restrictions you place on your originals." They didn't worry too much about what I did with the microfilm. Anyway, over the years the register grew to 105 hundred-foot rolls of microfilm. Quite a few people have used it. Strangely enough, I seldom ever used it myself. I had fun building it, though. Then we published a catalog, and then we published the second edition of the catalog to this collection, which made it infinitely easier for people to use. The catalog is still being used, and I discovered a lot of things that other scholars published about. That suited me just fine because I've had my fun building it, and whoever wanted to benefit from it beyond that, why, fine. And it's still there and is still being used.

Of all of the dozens of institutions that would work with me, only my own church refused to give me anything. I went to see Brother Joseph Fielding Smith and told him what I was doing. He said, "I think we can help you. Go see Brother Lund." So I went to see Brother Lund. He looked at me like he was wondering what spaceship I just got off by asking him about all of these sources. He says, "Well, come back tomorrow." I said, "Okay." So, I went back the next day, and he hardly recognized me, didn't remember anything about my requests. Besides, President Smith hadn't known what I

was asking for anyway. I wasn't happy that day because while I wasn't exactly lied to—I'm not quite sure what another word would be—I never got anything from my own people. But as soon as I published what we had, Salt Lake wrote me immediately and wanted a copy of the whole thing. I wrote back and said, "Well, Brethren, I'm sorry, but I've signed all kinds of agreements that under no circumstances would I ever make copies of these for anybody else. I've been told that if anybody else wants to get them, they would have to go to the holders of the originals, which is what I did." That may be a little tit for tat, but it was not one of the great days in my life to have those two brethren kind of weasel out of something I had been promised.

**WARD:** So, what has been your relationship with the leaders of the Church? I'm sure you have had a lot of interaction with Church Presidents and various people, and you said that you have been able to do your own thing.

**KIMBALL:** I was just a child—I was only ten or twelve years old—when J. Golden Kimball was killed in an automobile accident in Nevada, so that doesn't count very much except that he was a grandfather by marriage and a great-uncle by blood. My grandmother who raised me always claimed that she was J. Golden Kimball's favorite niece. Well, I'm sure sixty-five other nieces claimed the same thing. Every time J. Golden Kimball was on a Church assignment up north he would swing by my grandmother's home.

**WARD:** In Farmington?

**KIMBALL:** In Farmington, and of course I was there holding on to my grandmother's skirt, I wasn't really sure who he was or what was going on. But I'd never seen such great big cars, and these were big, big cars. In those days, there were hardly any cars at all in Farmington. Later on, I visited him in his home.

The next one was Spencer W. Kimball. One day I was in his office right after he became an Apostle, and I was stumbling all over

myself—Elder Kimball, Brother Kimball, Apostle Kimball—I was just trying to find out what I was supposed to say because I wanted to be very correct. He said, “Stan, you’re having a little trouble there. How would you like to call me ‘uncle?’” Well, I thought that was the greatest thing that ever happened. I said, “Oh, may I? Uncle Spencer, gee thanks.” So, from that day to the day he died he was Uncle Spencer. Every time I went to Salt Lake somehow or other he gave me an appointment, and it was just marvelous. See, I didn’t know my father. So most of my life I have turned to uncles and mission presidents and bishops and professors. I tried to turn them all into surrogate fathers, which is kind of pathetic, but it’s also very real in life. I missed that dimension, so Uncle Spencer became one of the most important men in my whole life. I published an article in *BYU Studies* about all of this, and one story that’s quite powerful is that I experienced the miracle of forgiveness long before Spencer Kimball’s book was ever written. When I turned sixteen, I was on my own. I had a car. I had money. I was the only child of an indulgent mother, who was seldom home. (My stepfather, a son of J. Golden Kimball, died eighteen months after I moved to Denver.) So, for better or for worse, I took over my life at age sixteen and did exactly as I pleased. There was nobody to say anything. Well, you do make some mistakes along the road, and I made some big ones. Anyway, that’s that. So that’s just a very tender and wonderful experience.

Then there was Mark E. Petersen. One time we were in Nauvoo near the Masonic Hall. It had a big sign out in front that read, “Cultural Hall.” And I started my usual grumping about it. “Why don’t we call it what it is? What’s this ‘Cultural Hall’? It’s not a Cultural Hall; it’s the Masonic Hall.” Brother Mark E. Petersen took exception to that, and he said one thing and another. “Why do historians have to tell everything? What’s this mania you have for telling everything?” I said, “Brother Petersen, you can’t bottle up truth. Now, would you rather have responsible Mormon historians answer the critics, or should we just abandon the field and let

the anti-Mormons run all over it?” Well, somehow the conversation drifted off, and that was the end of that. But, anyway, I thought I’d made a point.

Let’s see. Well, Violet and I were married by Harold B. Lee, bless his heart. That’s not a whole lot of experience, but, anyway, it was a very special kind of thing.

Then Joseph Fielding Smith, well, I’ve already told you that maybe he was confused. I don’t know. I’ll give the good brother the benefit of the doubt. But I was a little upset that day, I don’t mind saying. Then in 1969 at my university, I hosted a big conference on the Mormons in early Illinois. I wanted the RLDS historian there; I wanted the LDS historian there; I wanted my stake president and his RLDS counterpart there. So everything was going fine, and I invited Earl Olson to come and represent the Church at this conference—the first conference where LDS and RLDS really got together. We’d had little after-hours affairs before, but this was the first major conference, and I wanted it done right. Well, Earl Olson was very excited. He was planning on coming, and then he wrote me a letter and said, “Joseph Fielding Smith won’t let me come. They killed his uncle back there, and he doesn’t like the people in Illinois, and I can’t go to Illinois.” Well, I thought that was pretty, well, small, I guess. I don’t know what word to use. So I wrote Brother Hunter, who was pretty much over the Church Historian’s office in those days. He said, “I’ll go talk to Joseph Fielding Smith.” Well, the next letter I got was, “I’m sorry, Brother Kimball. Brother Joseph Fielding Smith won’t move on this.” So I had to go ahead without any official representatives from Salt Lake. That hurt me a lot.

I remember well one time when Marion Duff Hanks visited the St. Louis Stake. I told him I felt like an orphan as leader of the seventies quorum in the stake because we were not quite sure just what we were supposed to be doing. I was certain he was going to give me the “Now, brother” routine, but he did not. He said, “Stan, sometimes I feel the same way.” I really loved him for admitting that.



Then there are the many years I have known President Hinckley. It started in the forties in the Denver First Ward, when he was in the Sunday School presidency and used me a few times in Sunday School programs. Then, in 1974 and afterwards, I reported to him on what I was doing on the Mormon Trail for the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. We also shared the speaker's stand at some Mormon Trail programs. President Hinckley even used one of my trail books in 1997 when he took his family in a bus along the Mormon Trail.

**WARD:** Stan, you have a rich family background and legacy in the history of our Church. Tell me about your writing projects on Heber C. Kimball and the feelings you have about your Church heritage.

**KIMBALL:** Well, let me start with my grandparents, since they were seminal.

**WARD:** Now, who was your grandfather?

**KIMBALL:** David C. Hess, from Farmington, Utah. A wonderful man in many ways but not with money. There were economic problems. My mother needed someone to take care of her precious little boy, her parents needed to pay the mortgage off, and she needed to work. The only job she could get in the thirties, well the twenties and the thirties, that was worth anything required traveling. She was a professional beauty who traveled for a cosmetic firm. She traveled and paid her mother to take care of me, and that's the money that paid off the mortgage and saved my grandparents' home. My grandfather's father had seven wives and sixty-three children. I was living with one of those sixty-some-odd children. My grandmother's father had three wives and eight kids, so my grandparents grew up in polygamous households. I just absorbed this as a child and didn't think a thing about it. I thought, "Well, didn't everybody grow up this way?" Heber C. Kimball had sixty-five children, and John W. Hess had sixty-three, so I have 128 great-grand-somethings. Therefore, I

can stand on any corner in downtown Salt Lake and say hi to every fourth person who passes by and be related most of the time. Most of the people I loved as a child were not particularly orthodox, which is neither here nor there, but . . .

**WARD:** But the Word of Wisdom was a different story back then, wasn't it?

**KIMBALL:** Yes it was. Brother Heber J. Grant made it mandatory, and we're stuck with it. But, anyway, that was my heritage, and my grandmother saw to it that, by golly, I knew about this heritage and was proud of it. She succeeded gloriously well. She was a granddaughter of Heber C.; unfortunately, I was too young for that to really mean much to me. In retrospect, it is very powerful, and it is one thing to help me stay on the straight and narrow because I feel like I have to honor this heritage, you know. I had about eight relatives cross the plains, not just Heber C. I want to honor them in all of that, so I tried to pass this on to my kids and maybe I have. Maybe they'll think more of it later on. Maybe they think a lot of it right now, but if they do they keep it pretty much to themselves. Now I'm trying to pass it on to grandchildren, and I don't know how successful I'll be there, with all the distractions in the world today. So, where do we go from here?

**WARD:** The book on Heber C. Kimball—was that his diaries or was that a history? I can't remember.

**KIMBALL:** There are two books. One was a complete biography, which I'll talk about in a minute. The other was a full editing of all of his journals. The one I did for the University of Illinois in 1981 is called *Heber C. Kimball: Patriarch and Pioneer*. Then, the one I did for Signature Books in 1987 is called *On the Potter's Wheel* because he was a potter, and he alluded to that often in his sermons, you know. So it seemed like a good title. This Heber C. Kimball thing started out after Leonard Arrington became Church historian, and he was

laying out contracts all over the place. The sixteen-volume history of the Church was going to be published in all kinds of monographs. It was just a wonderful thing, and then all of that got blown out of the water. The Brethren weren't sure they really wanted professional historians in the office. It's a long, sad story. Anyway, he gave me a contract to do a documentary history of Heber C. Kimball. After I got into it a little bit, I decided I wanted to do a complete bio. He said, "Fine, do it." He got me a contract with Deseret Book. I took ten years. I read everything there was. This was during the days of Camelot, when the archives were open. Just to show you how deep I could get into records those days with no restrictions at all, I got into Brigham Young's distillery records, which showed which Mormons or non-Mormons bought quantities and kinds of liquid refreshments. The Kimball family had quite a sizable account with Brigham Young; in fact, one of his sons was excommunicated for drunkenness.

**WARD:** Heber's or Brigham's son?

**KIMBALL:** One of Heber's sons. Heber's oldest son was excommunicated for drunkenness. So I spent ten years on the book, and then another funny story happened. I finished the thing. I sent it to Salt Lake, and I said, "I'll be out in about a month, and we can talk about this manuscript." When I got there, the editor, whose name I've unfortunately forgotten, sat at that end of the table. I sat at this end of the table, and after a few pleasantries he said, "Stan, this is a great book. I'm so glad you wrote it." And then he slowly pushed the manuscript over towards me and said, "But I'd lose my job if I published it." And I said, "Don't worry about it. I'll find another press." They never asked for their advance against royalties back. And I didn't offer to give it back to them, either. So it was eventually published by the University of Illinois Press. While I'm certainly not criticizing Deseret Book, it was a little more of a university press book than it was a Deseret Book product. Of course, in the long run I benefitted from this. But to be fair to Deseret Book, they gave me signings, they featured the book in

their windows, and they plugged it very adequately. They just couldn't publish it, that's all. So I ended up getting the best of both worlds. I had a first-rate university press publish it and had Deseret Book to push it out here. That's how that story came about. About *On the Potter's Wheel*, Signature Books occasionally prints documentary things, like journals, so they asked me to edit the journals of Heber C. When those books came out ten years ago or so, hardbacks sold for thirty-five dollars apiece. Within a week they were selling them for seventy-five dollars, and within a month there weren't any books left. The collectors all bought them up. And now they're going for \$425.

WARD: And they didn't reprint?

KIMBALL: No. I have fussed and fussed and fussed with the powers that be. Bring out a paperback, for heaven's sake. Well, at a recent Mormon History Association Conference in Tucson, I cornered Gary Bergera and George Smith, and I said, "You know very well what I'm going to say, but I'm going to say it anyway. When are you going to bring out another edition, paper, or something, of *On the Potter's Wheel*?" I said, "It's now going for \$425." And Bergera said, "Well, I think it's about time we did something." And I said, "Bless you, brother." So maybe a paperback will come out.

WARD: What did George Smith say?

KIMBALL: Well, he didn't say no. I don't remember, but if it wasn't acquiescence, it was pretty close to it. So, who knows, maybe that will come out.

WARD: Let's talk some more about your Mormon heritage and about Nauvoo for a minute. Tell me your feelings about Nauvoo.

KIMBALL: Oh, yes, that's a great question.

WARD: When I went to Nauvoo for the very first time, I had a feeling like I had been there before, like I had seen it before, like I belonged there. Every time I return, I have the same impressions.

**KIMBALL:** Well, that's a lovely experience. My experience has been this: we came to Southern Illinois University in September 1959. Well, shortly after we got settled, I couldn't wait to take the family to Nauvoo and Carthage. So, somewhere in the early fall of 1959 we went to Nauvoo, which none of us had ever seen before, and there wasn't much going on in those days. Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated was just getting under way. But we went up and had a lovely time and visited the Heber C. Kimball home, the temple lot, and what few things were available—the mansion house, you know, and the Nauvoo house. Over the forty-one years that I lived in the area, I guess I averaged probably once a year going up to Nauvoo for some reason. Sometimes I was invited up, sometimes there was a conference, and sometimes I just took my kids, or relatives, or you know.

My cousin J. LeRoy Kimball was a physician in Salt Lake—he kind of willy-nilly got into this. He had simply purchased the old Heber C. Kimball home as a summer home. That's all there was to it. Well, the tourists ran him out. When they saw somebody was living there, they said, "Oh, can we come in and look around?" They got so bad that, to make a long story short, he deeded it over to the Church and bought another house. That's the nucleus of the Nauvoo Restoration Incorporated. Well, I was the historian, but there was only room for one Dr. Kimball, so I was just, "Hey, you," but I didn't mind. I understood, and it didn't bother me at all. I helped him whenever he'd let me help him, and sometimes I'd help him even when he wouldn't let me help him. Then I started ransacking some of the great libraries in greater St. Louis and published a series of articles in the old *Improvement Era* and uncovered a lot of new stuff about Nauvoo and the temple. I just had a glorious time poking around and writing these articles and publishing them all, helping us rediscover what Nauvoo was about and what the temple was about. LeRoy and I got along just fine. I didn't presume anything; I played a subordinate role, which didn't bother me at all. I felt I've made some kind of a contribution to Nauvoo.

What do I think about Nauvoo today and the temple? Well, the easiest way for me to explain is that I'm in love with a city that never existed. I've walked around that city in a snowstorm, and it's just like walking around paradise because everything is soft and muted. And I know, for hell's sakes, that they had outhouses and dung piles in the streets. I mean, who doesn't know that? But just because I know that's the way it really was doesn't mean I necessarily have to look at it that way. It doesn't bother me a bit that it's Williamsburg West and that it's a prettied-up city park. I know all of that, and I don't care. I just enjoy the beauty of it today and am not really bothered by not seeing the little outhouses.

As far as this new temple's concerned, I say, "Right on!" because I spent years studying that temple. I worked with an architecture friend, and I reconstructed the whole temple inside and out from source materials. I had my friend provide what is called kind of a tear-away drawing—where the temple is here, but then the walls are taken away in this area, and you can see inside. A cut-away, perhaps, is the expression I'm searching for. And that's been published everywhere and pirated by everybody and used in Nauvoo. I said, "Fine, go ahead if you can use it." That's what I did it for, and all of my publications on Nauvoo were used by the architects who did the plans for the new Nauvoo Illinois Temple. I said, "Fine, that's just a little contribution. It's in the public domain; I published it; I got paid for it. So now it's your turn." The strange thing is that I have no desire to go back for the open house. All kinds of people around here are going back to the open house, and they ask me why I'm not going. I said, "Well, I lived there forty-one years, and I saw what I wanted to see about the temple. I watched it going up. Someday I'll be back in the area and go. But I had my day with the temple, and I'm not anxious to go back now. I'm here, and this is where I want to be. I'll stay here."

Now, then, I was going to tell you a story. Shortly after the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph there were some seventeen claimants to the mantle of Joseph. One of those seventeen men was my other

great-great-grandfather, Alpheus Cutler. Heber C. had married the two daughters of Alpheus Cutler, so that's the connection. Neither one of them went west, by the way. They went to Winter Quarters, and then they turned around with their dad and they went back to Iowa. I'm descended from Alpheus Cutler because I'm descended from one of those two girls, Clarissa. Each of them had one son by Heber. When Heber went west and the wives stayed with their father, the boys were raised by their grandfather. When my great-grandfather Abraham Alonzo Kimball, one of the two boys, was about sixteen, his grandfather decided it was time he told him who he really was. And so he told him that he was the son of Heber C. Kimball, who was a great man, and he suggested that Abraham go out west to be with his real father. Well, he did, and eventually I show up. There still is a tiny, tiny little Cutlerite church today, and some years ago I drove to Independence, Missouri, and went to their little church. Well! I was the only Cutlerite in the whole church because the Cutlerites had all joined the reorganization, and other people took over the Cutlerite church. They didn't know quite what to make of the fact that I, in fact, was the only real Cutlerite in the church. So, anyway, I have this Hess heritage, this Kimball heritage, and this weird Cutler thing that makes me a member of a very small group.

**WARD:** What is your response when you hear people say that all the Mormon history has been written and ask why we are wasting our time?

**KIMBALL:** Well, after I suppress either a sudden fit of laughter or disdain at how ignorant people can be in the twenty-first century, I put on my professional nice-guy façade and say, "Well, I'll tell you how I feel about that, brother." Or sister or sir or ma'am or whoever is asking that idiotic question. It's just like if the director of the US Patent Office in the 1890s closed up shop and said everything that could possibly be invented had been invented and that we didn't need a patent office anymore. That's the same mentality behind saying

we have enough Mormon history. In both cases it's a total absurdity. See, we now have become quite a mature bunch. When I started out in Mormon history—when was it?—in the forties, I started using the archives. I'm not quite sure what I was doing, but I was doing something or other. Frankly, in those days most Mormon history was generally in the hands of good ol' boys—dedicated, enthusiastic amateurs. For serious-minded people, about the only place to publish anything was the *Improvement Era*. Well, Doyle Green ran it, and, bless his heart, he printed a whole bunch of my articles. Almost everything I ever wrote, Doyle printed, and I was very pleased with that. He was a great guy and a terrific photographer, by the way.

Well, since World War II we have been moving into what we call "New Mormon History." It's a process of maturation. It's a process of professionalization. It's a process where professional historians don't have to apologize for Mormon history. Mormon history has become respectable, a legitimate suborder of American history and Western history. To prove this, more and more non-Mormons are getting into the act. Also, more university presses are publishing our history—Oklahoma Press just brought out Will Bagley's study on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, for example.

I'm terribly proud of the little piece of the action I have, that I've contributed to it. And I'll insert this here to give you an example of how things just happen that you don't even think about. After the University of Illinois published my Heber C. Kimball book in 1981, Liz Delaney, associate director of the University of Illinois Press, bless her heart—one of the best friends the Church has ever had and certainly one of the best friends the Mormon History Association has ever had—noticed that mine was the fourth book on Mormon history the press had done. Before mine there was *Carthage Conspiracy* and *Kingdom on the Mississippi*. I forget the third. Liz said, "Well, wait a minute. We've got the making of a series." That is how the Mormon series got started at the University of Illinois Press, and now there are thirty or more first-class university press-quality books in the



University of Illinois stable. Not only do we have a press of impeccable credentials that has published this whole string of books, which can't help but cause other people to take a second look ("What is this Mormon history stuff anyway?"), but it has made it more possible for a well-known press to come in and print a history on the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Doubleday printed *Mormon Enigma*. Leonard Arrington's book on Brigham Young was done by Knopf. And this has got no place to go but to just flower. This is a great time to be alive in Mormon history. As I've already said, I'm seventy-five, and I remember very clearly the good-ol'-boy days. They did the best they could, and we should honor them for that. Now we're producing more and more, better and better stuff, and we are becoming more and more legitimate.

**WARD:** Yet, I am hearing stories that institutions, even BYU, are telling their students not to go into Mormon history, to not write their dissertations on a Mormon subject, because it will limit their progression as they try to move ahead in the education field.

**KIMBALL:** Well, okay, now I haven't heard that. But there's something I've got to confide in you and in anybody who reads this. For about the last three years I've been sort of out of the loop. I've got a first-class medical problem, and I'm only mentioning this strictly because I'm not on top of things as I used to be. So this has gotten by me. But now I'm very happy to see the younger generation coming out to MHA. There was a season when we researchers just got grayer and grayer and grayer.

**WARD:** Hey, I have quite a few gray hairs myself, under my blonde hairs. What do you think are two or three of the most important books that have been written about Mormon history in recent years, and why? Can you narrow it down to that few?

**KIMBALL:** Well, I can try. Three documentary collections I think are invaluable: *Mormon Americana* by Whittaker; of course, that

marvelous *Studies in Mormon History* by Allen, Walker, and Whittaker; and the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Dan Ludlow. Those are three landmark publications that can be and will be and ought to be used by anybody and everybody with any kind of interest in Mormonism. We're just getting such splendid bibliographic and biographical studies to help us. And, of course, this is a little bit off the subject, but we have these computer programs now that are extremely helpful in finding things. Of course Leonard Arrington's *Adventures of a Church Historian* I would put up there with some of the major works, along with Todd Compton's *In Sacred Loneliness*. Actually, everybody's favorite insider/outsider Jan Shipps's work *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* I would put up there with the five or ten best recently. That's a short list.

**WARD:** Now, I would like to ask you about the trails you have researched. They have been such a big part of your life. I remember using your trail books on my very first on-site research tour when I went back to Nauvoo and a couple of times since and have recommended them to other people. I thought it was wonderful. How did you get involved with this? I mean, it is so big.

**KIMBALL:** Well, a real quick answer is this. It started when we moved to Illinois when I got a job teaching at Southern Illinois University in greater St. Louis in 1959. As I've already said, the first thing we did, of course, was check out Nauvoo and Carthage, and then later on in the year we checked out Independence and Adam-ondi-Ahman and Richmond and Far West and saw all of the local sites, you might say, in the greater St. Louis area. Then one time two of my high priest friends and I took our young sons and went on a camping trip to Adam-ondi-Ahman. That was a terrific experience. We were going to rush back to go to church, but we decided, "Oh, hell, we go to church all the time. Let's just stay here and enjoy a Sunday morning here out in the middle of nowhere at Adam-ondi-Ahman." Then I got interested in how the Saints got from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters.

About this same time, C. Booth Wallantine, who is now director of the Utah Farm Bureau, organized and incorporated under Iowa law the Mormon Trail Association. Somehow he learned about me and somehow he wanted to bring me onboard. My first book on trails in 1965 was called *Guide to Historic Mormon America*, which, incidentally, is in its twenty-second printing, or edition, I think; there must be thousands of those things somewhere out in the world. But the joke (if you can call it that) or the pathetic background (you might call it that) is that I wrote the whole book sitting at my desk. I never went to any of these places. I just did research, and when it was all done Don Oscarson produced it. Anyway, both of us had a little laugh and said, “Well, gee, this is pretty good stuff. Why don’t we go look at it?” So, after the book was printed and published, we went to look at it. But the book is still around, and people still like it; I guess we did something right.

Then one thing led to another. In 1974, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation of the US Department of the Interior went to the Church and said, “We are going to do a definitive study of the Mormon Trail, and we want your help.” The Church leaders ended up nominating me to work with the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation and to do the study of the entire Mormon Trail from Nauvoo to Salt Lake. So I did, and everybody seemed to be quite happy with the whole thing. Later on the Mormon Trail got turned over to the National Park Service, and that led to a very close interaction with the Bureau of Land Management. It just evolved, and I became the poor man’s David Kennedy. I was the “ambassador” of the Church on all things pertaining to Mormon trails, plural—not just the Mormon Trail, but there are twelve or fifteen of those trails out there. I had a glorious time for many years on full expenses, by the way. If the government didn’t pay my expenses, the Church did. I didn’t get any pay for it, but I was happy to do it for expenses. So I “looked after Church interests” for years and years and years and traveled everywhere and showed up on the proper committees and associations. Well, that kind of died

down because we had pretty much done what we intended to do, especially during 1996 and 1997.

I was never more alive than when I was out wandering around on the trail. In a publication years ago, I said that, to me, the trail was like a linear temple. It was just a marvelous experience to be out there with my copyrighted phrase, “The power of place and the spirit of locale.” You know, there really is such a thing. When you are in an area where something important to you happened, there’s a special feeling that you don’t get anywhere else; it’s almost palpable. You can almost reach up and touch it, and it’s a glorious feeling. There are parts along the Mormon Trail where you can look farther and see less than in most other places. The hand of man just vanishes in some of the promontories out there.

I got into a little bit of funny stuff with Violet. She would always ask me how my trip was going if I was talking to her on the phone, or she would ask me how it went when I got home. I said, “Oh, it was my usual, boring, perfectly wonderful trip.” Then the trips and research kept on going and going and going. When editors would ask me to do this and that and something else, I was very happy to accommodate them. Then the National Parks Service wanted a major research book published on the trail that they could give to people who were interested in it, so I got the assignment and the paycheck—your tax dollars at work. The government pays rather well for this kind of stuff. So if they had money, I’d take it; if they didn’t, I wouldn’t worry about it. But fortunately they did have a budget. I was just so happy doing the trails that I just went on doing it for year after year after year. Then I started taking students out every summer. Nine years out of ten, I took university students with me. We’d get a fifteen-passenger van and go around on the trails, and they would earn university credit. So that’s the way that all got started.

**WARD:** But it expanded from what you originally started with the Mormon Trail to include the other trails—the Oregon and the Santa Fe, for example.

**KIMBALL:** After I'd done the Mormon Trail, I needed something else to do, so I started poking around, and I just found no end of trails. Of course, now I have a very liberal definition of "Mormon trail." If one Mormon went west on that trail, then that's a Mormon trail to me. So half a dozen of the trails I worked out were totally forgotten, totally obscure, but I kind of brought them back to life, and it was very pleasant. In 1996, when we were recreating the Mormon wagon train across Iowa, there were two variants, and those were the two variants I had discovered. It pleased me greatly that these variants that I had discovered and helped restore to life were thought important enough to plug into the major thrust from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters. Then I got off onto the Mormon Battalion trails, largely because my great-grandfather was in the Mormon Battalion. Then I became the consultant to the Santa Fe office on the Santa Fe Trail because I was working on the Mormon Battalion Trail, which is really the Santa Fe Trail.

**WARD:** Which great-grandfather was with the battalion?

**KIMBALL:** That is the one I've mentioned before, John W. Hess. His wife went along—it was his first wife, not my great-grandmother. Anyway she went along as a laundress, and that's an interesting story. Then it was so much fun, and I enjoyed it so much that I just kept looking around for obscure trails to go out and do something.

Sometimes when I was studying my notes I couldn't believe what I read in journals. Somebody would say something about a landmark or some such thing in their journals, and I would read it and say, "How could they have made such a mistake? They're a hundred miles away from where they think they are. I just don't understand this at all." So I kept working away, and pretty soon it dawned on me. They weren't talking about any trail I knew anything about—they were talking about another trail. So I started bringing my note cards together and working out the details on a trail I'd never even heard of, for example. Then, of course, as soon as I'd done my homework

and had gotten my maps and had laid the trail out as best as I could at my desk, then the thing to do was to get out and do the trail. Oh, that's a glorious experience—to have your maps and to get out, drive the trail, photograph it, write it up, and publish it. It's just one of the best jobs there is, doing that. So I did it for years and years and years. Right now I'm not doing much because in 1996 and 1997 what had been building for at least ten years finally climaxed. We had all the days of '96 in crossing Iowa and all of the days in '97 in going to Utah. As we all knew, after '97 things would level off, and they have. Right now not a whole lot is going on.

**WARD:** I thought Mike Landon was interested in the trails. Isn't he doing things with the trails now?

**KIMBALL:** Yes, he is, and other people are out there, too. We're still working on variants. We can work on variants until the cows come home. I'm reviewing a book on the California Trail that went nearby here, but I don't know much about it. Maybe that's why I agreed to review it—so I'd have to learn something about it.

**WARD:** You probably already answered this, but are there still Mormon or historic western trails you're working to preserve? Are there still trails out there that need to be preserved through the Bureau of Land Management?

**KIMBALL:** Well, now, you've just caused me to reflect on something. Since I published that big University of Illinois study, *Historic Sites and Markers Along the Mormon and Other Great Western Trails* in 1988, I am not aware of many working on any other trails. I think some people are sharpening up some of my pioneering work, but it just occurred to me that nobody has written to me and said, "Well, how about this trail? How about that trail? Why didn't you do this or why don't you do that?" Which, just momentarily reflecting on it, maybe I did a good job and there isn't a whole lot out there that I didn't do. Well, my book's been out quite a while and all the reviews

were pretty good and nobody said, “I wonder why he missed this, or that, or something else.” But that’s just an off-hand reflection that I never thought of until you asked the question. I would like to find something new to do, though.

**WARD:** Are you finding any corrections in your earlier work? Or things that you say, “Oh, when I first started this I really didn’t have the knowledge. I do now, and maybe I’ve done some dumb things”?

**KIMBALL:** Nobody has written me to say “I got lost following your book.” I’ve received no criticism. Once in a while, somebody will say, “Oh, I used your book to do this, that, and the other thing,” and that puts me in kind of an awkward position. I have to say, “Well, which book?” because so many of these people assume I wrote only one, and I’ve written a dozen on the trails. Anyway, it’s kind of nice to have people come up and say, “We used your book last summer.”

**WARD:** You certainly have made a great contribution for people who want to retrace their ancestors’ footsteps and visit early Church sites.

**KIMBALL:** I hope so. That’s kind of what I wanted to happen. Because I had such a glorious experience out there I wanted to share it with other people and let them have the same type of experience. I also did quite a detailed study on boat travel—the Mormons on boats—and also on railroads. That was published first in *BYU Studies* and has been anthologized a couple of times because nobody had ever really gotten into that at all.

**WARD:** I keep that *BYU Studies* issue on my shelf because I refer to it so often.

**KIMBALL:** Oh really?

**WARD:** My husband thinks that more needs to be done on boat and rail travel. He has all kinds of questions about how things happened or about what life was really like on the boats or trains.

**KIMBALL:** I'm sure that's true. Everything I knew I put in that article. I didn't hold anything back, and I haven't touched it since. Fred Woods did a study of the railroad around Quincy, which was a first-class study, and that's one of the few follow-ups that I'm aware of on this railroad stuff. Of course, I only went to Winter Quarters, or actually, Omaha, because the story of the Union Pacific is an entirely different thing that doesn't interest me at all. And one reason it made that study I did so difficult is that at the time frame I was working in there were over three hundred rail routes east of the Mississippi. That took a bit of doing to try and figure out from the journals just where in the world they did go, anyway. But I finally worked it all out, and I had a marvelous calligrapher, Diane Clements. She was the wife of a faculty member, and she's done all of my mapping for me way back. She's done it for thirty years. She could make beautiful, readable maps. So I was really lucky to have an in-house cartographer, which made my work a lot easier.

**WARD:** Did you have anything surprise you, anything that you had just never dreamed of as you were doing these western trails? What were your feelings when you discovered something new?

**KIMBALL:** If we were to look at it from a material point of view, I don't think I'd have a lot to say. I found some ruts that maybe people didn't know much about. But, you know, I was back and forth along the Mormon Trail for over twenty years so I should have found something. Actually, I think I was one of the first people in the Church to ever really locate Martin's Cove. I'm sure the local ranchers knew all about it. One day I was out with Hal Knight. He and I were doing a book for the *Deseret News*. We had a four by four, and we were wandering around the Martin's Cove area and not getting anywhere. So I said, "Why don't we just take a beeline? Let's just get in this thing, put it in four-wheel drive, and just drive straight up that hill right there just to see what happens." So we did. We had just gotten over the hill, and all of a sudden the ground just gave way, and I had to jam



on the brakes because there was Martin's Cove way down there. I'd never seen it before, I'd never heard anybody describe it before, and although I'm sure other people had seen it, they'd never done much with it. At least it was a discovery for me, even if I was not the first who had ever put that thing together.

But, aside from the few odds and ends like that, the most important discovery I think I made was how peaceful and quiet and spiritual the whole experience was. I found it almost ethereal, and then I came up with this expression, "a linear temple," and quiet spots and pools of reflection. I went back through the Bible looking for poetic phrases to describe sacred places way back when and borrowed a bunch of those biblical expressions to explain how I felt on this Mormon Trail. But perhaps my greatest discovery was what wonderful people live along the trail today, most of them non-Mormons. And I found out that if they were approached correctly, they'd fall all over themselves trying to help you. I discovered something that I should have realized but that I didn't before then. That is that most of these people who lived along the trail had the attitude that, "Well, hey! I'm not Mormon, but it's our history too." And I said, "It sure is." Well, I'd never thought about that. It's not just all ours—it's Iowa's history, Nebraska's history, or Wyoming's history. People would go out of their way to drive me around and show me things.

**WARD:** Is there anything more on trails that you can think to tell us?

**KIMBALL:** Well, some of the greatest experiences were when I would go camping with Bureau of Land Management people. For years we would go camping every summer. These were two LDS guys working for the Wyoming Bureau of Land Management, and none of us had any sense. But we just got in this brother's truck and took off and went wherever my maps indicated. If we had to take down a fence (or even a gate) in order to get through it—what you do is, if you're stopped by a barbed wire fence, you remove the staples from

three poles and drop the wire down on the ground, drive over it, and then staple it back up. So we just went wildly all over the place. At the end of the day we'd put the tent up, and we'd have dinner and slowly go to sleep. Oh, boy, those were some great camping experiences out there under the stars.

**WARD:** Do you have a favorite part of all of the trails you have studied?

**KIMBALL:** The more desolate it is, the better I like it. Wyoming is my favorite area. Like I say, I love to climb up on top of promontories and look farther and see less than any place else.

**WARD:** Have you done any air reconnaissance on any of these trails?

**KIMBALL:** Yes, I've flown the trail twice in a fixed wing airplane. Then the highlight of '97 was doing the entire trail by helicopter. Now *that* I would have done for nothing. I was on the payroll at a nice retaining fee, so that made it doubly nice. But that was one of the things I'd always wanted to do but never thought I would do. It was in the production of *Trail of Hope*, and I was their guide and talking head in the documentary. That's when I said, "Well, if you guys really want to do it right and be memorable and not just make another video, then find some money, and let's do it by helicopter." Finally they agreed. So that was one of the great highlights.

**WARD:** It sounds incredible.

**KIMBALL:** It was a great experience. Some of the footage was used, of course, in *Trail of Hope*. Then you've heard of Living Scriptures in Ogden? I did about three or four videos for them, and we would go out into the field. They had a very professional camera crew with them who did some really first-class work. Those glory days are over for a while, although there are some things coming up. There's the hand-cart experience coming up. There will probably be some celebrations

for that, and we'll dream up celebrations right on up to, I don't know, the railroad, perhaps, and we may do something about that.

**WARD:** Here's a thought that just came to me. If you had been in good health, would you have gone on the tall ships and had the European experience?

**KIMBALL:** I would have been tempted, but I don't think so. I've never cared much for that part of the story. And, let's see, what did it take—thirty-nine, forty-five days? No, I'm much happier out in the wilds of Wyoming than on a ship. I let other guys do it. Bill Hartley and Dean May did it, and that suits me just fine. I've worked out my own little niche, and I just keep deepening it.

**WARD:** Let's talk about your publications a little bit. You said Mike Landon is working with you now, cataloguing your writings.

**KIMBALL:** Well, let's split that into two answers. I have written 18 books and have published 136 articles. See that lower shelf over there? Well, that's my work. That's been my great joy professionally—cranking out all of that stuff since my first publication in 1949. I've been publishing ever since then. As a workaholic stuck in the Midwest, well, this was my compensation, I guess you'd say, particularly since all the expenses were taken care of.

Now, the second part of your question. Here we have my age (seventy-five), we have a medical problem, and we have me moving from the St. Louis area. If I had not moved, everything would have stayed in filing cabinets and bookcases, and absolutely nothing would have happened. But this move out here precipitated a situation that I had to face before I wanted to face it. To make a long story short, Mike has been after me for my papers. Then again most of the institutions in Utah have been after me. I just felt better letting Mike have them. First of all, I like Mike. That wasn't the determining factor, but he's a very nice guy. Anyway, I made what I consider a wise choice, and I'm very happy with it.

Well, when Mike heard I was ready to start turning stuff over, he came out to my university from Salt Lake to pick up what I had. I was having to vacate my office, so he took that material back. Then I kept working away, and he came back a second time and took more. He's transferred thirty-six boxes so far, and I've turned over to him nothing of my personal papers and nothing of my trail stuff. I have four filing cabinets out in the garage just absolutely packed with material that will eventually go to Mike—that will be personal stuff, personal correspondence. I've got correspondence back to 1928. As far as possible, I've got almost every letter that was ever written to me and copies of virtually every letter I ever wrote. I'm a maniacal packrat. I just save everything. Now, he made me this rough inventory: research files, trail guide research, selections from my books, copies of books, drafts of all sorts of things, government publications, minutes of meetings of all the associations I've been to, and manuscript drafts. It just goes on and on. There are all of the notes and research that went into Heber C. Kimball's books, for example, and research files on Masons and family lifeline history, photographs, research on Nauvoo and Kirtland—the early Church. Well, it's just a long, long list that adds up to thirty-six archival boxes. Now, there are probably thirty-six more boxes somewhere around here. It'll probably be years before anybody will ever care to get into the boxes Mike has taken. But maybe down the road somebody will care to get into it, and they'll be a lot luckier than I was.

For example, when I started work on these things, I wanted to know what other people had done. You've got to know the literature before you can add anything to it. Well, for instance, there used to be an organization in the thirties called Utah Pioneer Trails and Land Markers Association. President George Albert Smith was a member of this group, so here we have the first presidency behind this group. The members did an awful lot of good work. I knew a little bit about it, and so I started going into the archives all around Salt Lake, looking for their records. I found almost nothing. That organization seems

to have come and gone. Whatever papers or archives they had, either they never had any, or they've disappeared. I don't want that to happen. That's why I keep everything, and that's why the Church History Department is going to get it. I don't think there's anything in there to be censored. I have no feeling that some of this stuff will be held back because I can't think of any reason why anybody would hold it back. You get to be my age and you start thinking about a life's legacy. What are you going to leave, anyway? Well, I will be very happy knowing that I've got sixty or seventy boxes of things people can use if and when they want to.

**WARD:** How soon do you think that will be available? Will they put it out a paper at a time, or are they going to wait?

**KIMBALL:** Well, they prefer to do it all together. It makes it easier to do it.

**WARD:** You amaze me because you have such a wide variety of interests. Do you have other hidden interests that you are involved with?

**KIMBALL:** It's a good thing that Columbia University put the full force of their discipline on me. I hadn't been at Columbia, but a couple of weeks before I realized how totally outclassed I was and how hard I was going to have to work to make it there. They really had to discipline me. I often wondered how in the world I ever got into Columbia as ill prepared as I was, and I think I figured it out. I was living in North Carolina at the time, and I applied from North Carolina. I'm positive that the acceptance committee looked at my record and said, "Well, this guy doesn't have much of an academic record at all, but we do need geographic distribution. He's from North Carolina, and that will look good on our spreadsheet. So let's let this guy in, and if some miracle happens and he makes it, well, fine and good. If he doesn't, well, he flunks out. He had his chance, and it didn't work. So let's just take a chance on this guy." Well, they didn't

know that I was at the end of the road and had absolutely no place to go. I had two children already and then had a third child before I got my doctorate, and I just simply had to buckle down and really learn what real discipline was. I owe Columbia that—not a lot more, but they did discipline me, which I desperately needed.

WARD: So that exposed you to a lot of varying subjects then?

KIMBALL: Oh, yes. Well, I play the piano, and I try to keep up on that. I enjoy that a great deal. I love to accompany people. I accompanied Violet, who sings, or used to, anyway. For years and years and years I was her live-in accompanist, a job that I enjoyed, and I still do like to accompany people. I'm kind of an on-again, off-again stamp collector. There's a branch of stamp collecting called "topical collections." It's where you select a topic, like butterflies, or railroads, or elephants—anything that you're interested in. Then you go worldwide, and the joy of that collecting is that you want to get every stamp that's ever been published in the world with an elephant on it or whatever. Well, that fascinated me, so I put together a topical collection on Utah and the Mormons. And I really believe I have every single known postage object in the world on Mormons and Utah. About every year I discover one or two other things and arrange to get them and keep them in an album, and someday I'll give that to Glen Leonard as part of the Church museum because postage stamp collecting is one of the biggest hobbies in the world. The *Ensign* published a small article on it, and the *Church News* gave me three-fourths of a page on it once in January 1994.

I am wild about mystery short stories. I subscribe to the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine*. I don't like novels. I seldom read a novel, but I love short stories, especially mystery ones. I find them terribly relaxing, and good mystery writers are excellent writers. Pulp fiction magazine writers are not given much credit, you know. But that's not true at all. The really good ones are as good as any other authors I've ever read. And, of course, *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* gets the cream of

the crop. I used to have it sent to my office as a professional journal and deducted it off my income tax.

**WARD:** I had another thought when you were talking about your interest in mystery short stories. What is your take on all of these LDS historical novels?

**KIMBALL:** Well, to answer your question, I don't read them. I seldom read anybody's novels, so the fact that I don't read Mormon novels doesn't mean anything. Well, I've got to contradict myself. I've read everything by Michael Crichton, but you see that's sci-fi. Of course, I'm wild about mystery, but I'm just as wild about sci-fi. Therefore, if Michael Crichton writes a six-hundred-page *Jurassic Park*, why, I'll read every page, but that's a highly specialized thing. I have read about half a dozen Mormon detective mystery novels, and I find them very enjoyable because a good writer puts the reader in the picture. If the setting is Salt Lake City and if you know Salt Lake City, then you recognize the landmarks that the author sticks in—where a tobacco shop is, for example, or where the post office is, or where Highland Drive is. That adds much to the pleasure of reading it because you know where Highland Drive is and you're in the picture; you can kind of just see it as it goes along. But as far as Deseret Book, I'm sure they're fine books, but I never read them and I never will. I read most everything by Isaac Asimov, who was a great sci-fi writer. I have most of the printed versions of *Star Trek*. When you're in college, you read all the classics you're supposed to read. Well, fine, I've done all of that. Now I read just what I want to read. I have practically memorized the Sherlock Holmes canon.

**WARD:** Stan, which historians have influenced you the most as a teacher, researcher, and a writer?

**KIMBALL:** That's another one of your great questions, Maurine. And my answer is, I don't have a pat answer. I'm not even sure I've got an answer at all. I have read widely. I think I have read every major work by a major Mormon scholar, so I know the literature,

and I did not consciously say, “Oh, look how they’ve done this. I rather like that; I think I’ll pick up on that.” Now that doesn’t mean that I didn’t unconsciously absorb all kinds of stylistic matters from a quite wide-ranging read of the literature. So I can’t really sit here and say, well, I learned this from so-and-so and this from so-and-so and this from somebody else. Looking back on my time at Columbia University, it’s pretty much the same story. I had a lot of excellent professors, but I do not ever recall saying, “Well, I think I like their approach in this respect and their technique.” Now, I may have absorbed it, but I didn’t consciously label it as anything or even recognize it, with one exception. The one person that I did let influence me, the person I consciously worked to emulate, was Jacques Barzun, who was the reigning intellectual at Columbia in my time. He’s ninety-something and recently brought out a definitive study of Western culture. The name doesn’t resonate with the current generation because after all I was studying with him in the mid-fifties. That seems like yesterday to me, but to people not my age that is an entire generation back.

Now the one thing I want to make clear is, I don’t want to appear to say, “My peers taught me nothing, and I absorbed nothing.” Because I’m sure I did, but I just really didn’t think about it. That’s probably a reflection of my independence. I don’t write well with others; I’ve written very, very few things as a coauthor. I’m just a grubby historian who sits in the dark of the moon and tries to figure out why the world works the way it does. So that’s the bare truth about influences. I hope, on the other hand, that the reverse is true. I hope my students have learned something from me. Once in a while I hear from one, and I’ll think, “Well, maybe I taught him something, or her, as the case may be.” I taught about fifteen thousand students.

**WARD:** My goodness!

**KIMBALL:** And maybe in the next world I’ll find out how some of them turned out. I’ll have an eternity. There won’t be any rush. If we’re all in the same kingdom, that is. A friend of mine wrote



a book, and I think the title was *One Lucky Guy*. He gave me a copy, so I read it. I think I've been another lucky guy. I've done everything, everything I ever wanted to do. Violet has never hindered me in any way. Whatever I wanted to do she went along with it. Money can't buy that.